

The LEVeller

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ALEXANDER Mc ARTHUR



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"I am ready"

The Leveller

By

Alexander McArthur

(Author of "Gemmo," "Rubinstein," "Irish Rebels," Etc., Etc.)



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Inscribed to
SIR FRANCIS W. BRADY, Bart.

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The Leveller

CHAPTER I.

Out of the gloom of the great Isaacs Cathedral a young girl, wrapped to the teeth in furs, stole furtively, and casting an eager glance up and down the snow-covered roadway, beckoned to a passing *iswostschik*, who quickly responded to her order and drove up to the sidewalk.

“Wasily Ostroff, Line Four,” Louboff Malkiel said briefly.

“Twenty-five kopecks, *Barishnya*.”

The young girl shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. Bargaining is a custom and a necessity in Russia.

“Twenty-five kopecks!” she echoed. “Do you take me for the Minister of Finance? I will give you fifteen or nothing.”

“Make it twenty, *Barishnya meliya*,” pleaded the driver, as he looked down admiringly into the dazzling fairness of her lovely face. “I will take you for fifteen, but a beautiful young lady like you, I know, would not have the heart to force so close a bargain. You see, the day is cold, my horse is hungry,

and I—I am hungry, too. *Ye Bokha barishnya!*”

The soft, delicious curves of Louboff Antonivna’s beautifully chiseled mouth widened into a smile.

“I don’t believe you,” she replied with mock severity, “but *charasho*; I will give you tea money.”

Smiling, the *iswostschik* threw back the fur of his sleigh with that servile yet gracious courtesy so characteristic of the peasant Russian, and handed her in.

He buttoned the rug at the back of the seat with clumsy fingers, for his hands were encased in thick fur gloves, tucked the fur well about her feet, and got up on his own seat with as much alacrity as the heavy swathings of his body would allow; then with a grunt of approval and a word of endearment to his lean and hungry beast, he drove off in the direction of the Neva.

Louboff settled down under her heavy fur coverings comfortably; then the noise of horses’ hoofs behind her made her look round suddenly. All at once the usual fairness of her complexion deepened with a flush of annoyance, and her starlike eyes lost their softness in one swift flash of anger.

“Ah, so I am under surveillance!” she muttered petulantly.

Then she bent forward to the *iswostschik*. “Turn and drive toward the Winter Palace,” she commanded briefly. “Drive quickly and there is big tea money for you!”

“*Charasho! Charasho!*” assented the driver, and turning immediately, Louboff was enabled to get a good look at the official following her. Then, as she expected, the latter gave a like order to his *iswostschik*, seeing which Louboff laughed.

“And it is to such stupid as these that they entrust our surveillance!” she thought sneeringly.

A few seconds later she bent forward again. “It is too cold to go farther. Drive directly to Wasily Ostroff,” she said, not without a tremor in her voice as her hand touched some papers inside the fur lining of her cloak.

“I hear; I obey,” replied the man gladly, and whipping up his horse they drove swiftly along the quay and over the Nicholaifsky Most or Nicholas Bridge; the winds sweeping up the frozen Neva cutting the exposed flesh of their faces till it tingled.

Turning to the right, they entered the quarter of St. Petersburg which corresponds to

the famous *Quartier Latin* of Paris. The Masily Ostroff, or Basil Island, is one of the many islands of the Neva—the quarter of the city where the various schools, colleges and academies of art are situated, and the quarter where students of all classes congregate daily and usually find lodgings.

They drove up Line Four, and again Louboff cast an anxious glance behind. The same official was following.

Calling to the *iswostschik* to stop, Louboff Antonivna got out and paid the man his fifteen kopecks, with twenty-five extra for *natschai*, or tea money, listening with a smile of amusement to his blessing, which embraced the whole hierarchy of heaven. Then she went through a small garden, up a steep flight of wooden steps, and after ringing was admitted at once.

A young man, like her in features and coloring, but unlike her in that he was sinister and forbidding, whereas she was beautiful with a beauty that was startling in its fresh youthfulness and candor of expression, came to the door.

“I waited a full half hour,” she began crossly, “but no one came. I have the papers

still, and I was followed right here, even to the very door."

"Followed?" he whispered, and blinked his eyes perplexedly.

"Yes. Don't ask me again to do such work. See, my hands are trembling."

"Well, it is good, *doushinka* (little soul), that you thought of coming here. Boris Alexanderowitch is with me; your visit could not be better timed. He is in my room now. Remember, he is a fanatic—a Slavophile of Slavophiles. It would be an excellent thing if you could pretend that you thought well of his faith. I have been able to tell him much about you, but——" He put his finger to his lips, smiled, and led the way upstairs to a room on the first landing.

"Boris Alexanderowitch, this is my sister, Louboff Antonivna."

A young man jumped to his feet as they entered the room, and to Louboff, slender and petite, he looked a young giant. He drew his six feet to their full scope, and, with his heels well together, gave her the regulation Russian military salute, bending the head only.

In his uniform of a student of the Engineering School, or *Corps des Mines*, he was a soldierly and handsome figure. Looking up,

Louboff caught the flash of blue eyes, the sheen of golden hair, and a smile which illuminated a countenance singularly honest and open.

“What a nice boy!” she thought instantaneously, and she gave him her hand, blushing because of the circumstances of their meeting. There had been so much plotting to accomplish it, and he looked so simple, so honest. It seemed a shame to take advantage of his good nature; but Michel was looking on lynx-eyed, and her animation and smile came in readiness.

Boris Alexanderowitch was conscious of a curious sensation as he looked down into the delicious Oriental face, with its wistfulness in repose, its sensitiveness and its expression of dreamy languor—a sensation of coming suddenly on something long sought for and much wanted, a sensation of finality; the settling of a desire poignant, keen and overwhelming to the senses.

A delightful feeling of the deeper scope of life took possession of him as he feasted his eyes on her beauty. The color in her cheeks, caused by contact with the frosty air outdoors, was faint and lovely, like the petals of

a wild rose. Her eyes shone and danced, and Boris noticed, when cast down, that her lashes lay thick and curling fully an inch on her cheeks.

His admiration was undisguised. For several minutes he kept his eyes on her like one fascinated, and his courtesy toward her was exaggerated and extreme, tinged with a shyness very flattering to the instincts of a woman.

Michel turned to a cupboard to get out the vodka, with which all guests on arrival in winter time are greeted, and while he fumbled with the liquor glasses he smiled.

"It will be as easy as a song, as easy as a dream," he thought triumphantly, as he turned with the glasses and the bottle. "He is smitten already."

"Louboff, roll some cigarettes," he said authoritatively.

"Pardon me," cried Alexanderowitch, jumping to his feet. "Can I not do that?"

"No; Louboff is an expert. I never smoke any but those she rolls. You must try some." Michel interposed, and Louboff laughingly got the tobacco and papers, working these into cigarettes with incredible swiftness. Boris gazed intently.

Michel poured out the vodka, and they drank standing. Then a servant brought in the samovar and Louboff made tea, pouring into glasses with silver holders and long spoons, gilded and heavily enameled. They settled themselves comfortably, and after a while Michel excused himself for a few minutes on the plea of a letter to write, and, going into an adjoining room, left Louboff and Boris alone.

For a few moments neither spoke. Both felt a little awkward—the awkwardness of interest and youth—then Louboff, remembering her brother's advice as to the Slavophile tendencies of their guest, said gently:

“Just fancy, Boris Alexanderowitch, where I have just come from I was born; I may say under its very shadow, and only to-day I see it for the first time—your great Isaacs Cathedral. How splendid it is!”

Boris looked up, and Louboff, seeing the sudden flash of interest in his eyes, knew she had scored a point.

“Yes, it is very splendid, Louboff Antonivna. Were you there for service?”

“No; the fancy just took me to go in and see it,” she went on, keeping her starlike eyes

fixed on his interested face. "I am not an Orthodox, you know, but I am very much drawn toward your religion. It has something that goes to my heart. *A je ne sais quoi* that appeals to me. It is wrong of me to admit this, I suppose," she added, faltering.

"Oh, no, no!" he broke in eagerly, with the enthusiasm of one whose faith was the vital part of his life—the beginning and ending of his day's thought, the pivot about which his whole Slavophile sentiments centered. His heart commenced to beat quicker. The thought of a possible proselyte in Louboff set all his interest afire. It would be a task he would undertake, as Louboff well knew and counted on.

"Do not let such a wrong thought take hold of you. Your religion is good—all religions are good—but, Louboff Antonivna, our religion is best of all."

She smiled. "It is a very wonderful religion," she assented gravely; "an ideal religion. But so many of our people affect your belief for mercenary reasons, I hate even to say it—well—even interests me."

"You are so honest—too honest!" he broke in admiringly.

"No," she said simply, "I only tell you a

fact. Michel, for instance, he would join the Orthodox Church to-morrow only because it would help him in his profession."

"Of course Michel would, and why not?" the young man himself said laughing, as he entered the room. "All religions are a farce. Do right; that is the main precept which most people forget in their concern for form. Yes, Boris Alexanderowitch, I would go through the longest ordeal and prostrate myself before your images till my knees ached. Nor," he added tauntingly, seeing the surprised reproach mingled with pity in Boris Alexanderowitch's face, "would I be the first Jew, either, to do so?"

"Michel!" cried Louboff pleadingly.

"He talks of that of which he knows nothing," Boris said soothingly, turning to Louboff. "Perhaps he will know some day."

Michel laughed derisively. "Oh, perhaps, perhaps," he said, drawling out the last word, "but don't put notions into Louboff's head. See her face—she is too much interested as it is. Let us talk of something else. She came here to have me take her to see our collection in the Corps des Mines. Suppose we go there, all three. I know it will only make the thousandth time you have played the part of

cicerone, Boris Alexanderowitch; I saw you with some ladies yesterday—one of them, I think, the daughter of the Minister of the Interior.”

“Yes, my cousin, Vera d’Annenkoff.”

Brother and sister exchanged glances.

“Your cousin! Why, how many cousins have you among the Ministers? The Minister of Instruction is also your cousin. What splendid chances you have, Boris Alexanderowitch!” Michel went on with meditative enviousness, “you will get some great post; be made a general—a member of the Privy Council, perhaps.”

“I hope so, why not?” assented Boris Alexanderowitch, well pleased to have his possible brilliant prospects commented on in Louboff’s presence.

“Yes, why not?” echoed Michel with a sigh.

“Well, I will get my cloak,” said Boris rising.

“*Charasho, charasho,*” said Michel nodding as he went with him to the door.

As soon as the footsteps of the young Russian student had died away, Michel turned to his sister hastily.

“Can you do it? Your instincts of a

woman must tell you," he queried in a whisper of intense earnestness.

"Do what?" Louboff's face had grown paler, her eyes were troubled.

"Use him."

"Michel, I—I cannot say."

Into the face of the young Jew there came a frenzied enthusiasm.

"You must! You must! Listen, Louboff," he cried, catching hold of her two hands and gazing sternly into her frightened eyes. "We need him. He holds the key to our success, and no sacrifice will be too great to gain him. Flatter him, lead him on, let him make love to you. A kiss—— What may he not tell you for——"

"Michel!" Louboff's eyes were blazing, her expression full of angry amazement, her voice shrill in its horror.

He flung her hands from him. "Can you not forget yourself for a purpose?" he asked with sinister wrath. "Is there any price too great to pay for revenge—revenge for our wrongs; the wrongs of years, the cruelties, merciless, inhuman, hellish, against our people. Louboff, have you forgotten them? Are you so lacking in spirit? Would you hesi-

tate?" He went on breathlessly; then he paused. "Bah!" he cried derisively.

"Michel, you are out of your mind!" Louboff put her arms about her brother's neck and kissed him gently and tenderly; then she said, her musical voice low and surcharged with emotion:

"My brother, I hate them as they hate us; I will use him if I can, but——"

It was Michel who roused himself first, and in a second his features had assumed their wonted expression of passiveness and patience. Boris Alexanderowitch was descending the stairs.

"May the God of our fathers assist us!" he murmured reverently, then he went forward to open the door. Ten minutes later the trio were strolling along the banks of the Neva, Boris a little ashamed. It was the first time in his life that he had ever been in the company of Jews, and he tried to ignore the surprised glances of his comrades whom he met and to give all his attention to Louboff.

"Well, even if she is a Jewess, surely she is divinely lovely," he told himself for solace.

CHAPTER II.

When Boris Gourowsky took up his quarters in Line Four of the Wasily Ostroff an anxious mother in the Provinces wrote to him:

“Whatever you do, my boy, make no friends with young people whose family antecedents are not well known to you. I would rather you had found lodgings the other side of the Neva; but since you say they are all too dear, you must only be very careful. Above all, avoid the Jews. They are the ring-leaders in all the student riots, and it is so easy for one totally innocent to become mixed up in such affairs.

“Every evening write me exactly your movements of the day; whom you have seen, what you have done, and where you have spent your time. Go to the Annenkoffs as often as possible, even if they are not cordial to a poor relative.

“Remember Count d’Annenkoff is my brother and you have a right to his protection. Therefore, shut your eyes to anything the Countess may say or do. She is very

mondaine and severe of manner; consequently, she may snub you, but that must make no difference in your attitude.

"I have a premonition about you, my boy. I fear this journey of yours to St. Petersburg; you would take it on Friday, but I am probably only superstitious. Still, do as I tell you, and, God willing, all will be well."

On the receipt of this epistle, Boris Alexanderowitch smiled with the heedless contemptuousness of youth. He knew what his mother feared, and that her fears were based on well-grounded facts.

The whole Wasily Ostroff was honey-combed with Nihilism and Nihilistic doctrines, but Nihilism had no attraction and no terrors for him. He despised it principally because he considered that the Poles and the Jews were its leading spirits, and for both races he had the Russian's profound and inborn dislike.

That there were abuses and disadvantages in the government of his country, he was the first to acknowledge. He longed, like thousands of his conservative countrymen, for a constitutional government, but he was also aware that his country was far from ripe for it. He knew this, having watched his father's

labors, his disappointments on behalf of his serfs.

Alexander Gourowsky had been one of the first to free the five thousand souls that labored for him, and before the Ukase of the Tzar liberating them had been a diligent worker toward this end; but the results had been far from those desired. Boris Gourowsky had seen his father die a slow death, caused by disillusion and disappointment. The once prosperous lands of Gourowsky, when owned by Count Gourowsky, had given a generous revenue; the peasants were uniformly content and happy. They always had plenty to eat, fur cloaks or *shoubas* for the winter, a warm stove* to sleep on, and most of them owned a *balalika* or a concertina to make music on in the evenings when their work was done.

Then the Ukase of Alexander II., freeing the serfs, changed the old order. On the Gourowsky estate there was great rejoicing, none being happier than Count Alexander Gourowsky himself. For a while things went on splendidly, but only for a while. Then, little by little, the once prosperous property began to decline.

* During the six months of cold weather the Russian peasants sleep on the tile covering of their massive stoves.

In the various villages of the estate Jewish money lenders settled in the guise of shopkeepers, ostensibly assuming Orthodoxy to make their residence possible.

Ivan, the thriftless, suddenly a land owner where formerly he had been a slave, all too soon, because of easy credit, found himself in debt. Vodka was plentiful, and it was much easier and far pleasanter to sit at home and drink than work.

Bit by bit, the holdings of the peasants were mortgaged to the Jews. Alexander Gourowsky did his best to stem the new tide of affairs. He went among his once happy people, threatening, reasoning, and exhorting, but to no purpose. Sometimes when Ivan was sober he would listen to reason, but when Ivan was drunk—a usual condition, for vodka of the vilest sort, at extortion prices, was plentiful—the money lenders were his best friends and Count Alexander a meddler.

For some years things went on so, till credit and with it vodka, had ceased; then the peasants too late realized that their boasted freedom had brought with it a bondage cruel and merciless, that of the rapacious Jews, who now assumed practical ownership of their

holdings. This forced the peasants to a ceaseless round of toil, that the mere interest of moneys lent might be paid.

On the Gourowsky estate there followed several bloody anti-Semitic riots. Count Alexander Gourowsky was blamed for these. Paid emissaries of the money lenders circulated various reports till, harassed beyond endurance, Count Gourowsky, broken down in health, was forced to start for St. Petersburg in a raging snow storm, to answer the questions of the authorities. An attack of pneumonia caused his death, but, even at the last, he still thought of his "souls," as he always called his people.

He had impoverished himself in the vain attempt to pay off their mortgages. In leaving all to his widow and his only son, Count Boris, he begged them to live frugally and continue the building of the schools he had planned throughout his estate.

"It is not in Nihilism, but in education, that the ultimate salvation of my country lies," wrote the philanthropist, in his will; and Boris, who was then only fourteen, vowed to follow his father's teachings and comply with his request to the uttermost.

CHAPTER III.

It had been pure accident that led Boris Gourowsky, as he thought, to the rooms of Michel Malkiel. Malkiel, a schoolmate, had the rooms immediately below him, and much as he tried to avoid the young Jew, still total avoidance was out of the question.

On several occasions Michel had invited him to a "spread" in his rooms, but Boris had always found a means of excusing himself. Michel would offer him a cigarette; Boris if he had to accept it would crumble it unsmoked between his fingers, throw it away or purposely drop it.

But Malkiel had a purpose, and Boris' good nature was not proof against it. On the morning in question, immediately after luncheon, while Boris was working, there had been a knock at his door, and Michel, humble, perplexed and begging, stood outside. He was utterly at sea over a proposition—the examination was near—would Boris Alexanderowitch help him out?

The young Russian had hesitated. He

would have slammed the door in Michel's face had he followed his instincts, but his good nature was stronger. It would only be a matter of a few minutes, he told himself, an hour at most, and then it would be a case of a double avoidance, of picking a quarrel, of anything to free himself from the insistent courtesy of his schoolmate.

Even as he followed the latter downstairs, he decided to change his lodgings. Then Louboff arrived, and Boris, vanquished, drank vodka and tea with them.

"Why did I not refuse?" he asked himself angrily, as he found himself between the brother and sister, on the banks of the Neva. "I am without stamina," he thought; then Louboff glanced up at him and his misgivings were lost in wonder at her beauty.

After an hour in her company, Boris Gourowsky's preconceived notions of the Jewish race received a somewhat rude jolting. In her all the distinctive traits of a people he had learned to dislike intensely were absent or so effaced as to be nonrecognizable. The more he talked to her the more his notions became confused or upset, and he began to ask himself if he were not narrow-minded to suppose it was otherwise with Jews than with

Christians, or if in one race, as in the other, various classes were not to be found. He asked himself if the lines between the objectionable and the unobjectionable were not equally marked among his own people.

He realized his feelings with overmastering force.

Louboff a Jewess! He looked at her sideways and the loveliness of her features dazzled his senses. There came to his memory the Jews of the Provinces: the sleek, hawk-nosed men with their whining voices, oil soaked ringlets, evil smelling gaberdines; the Jews who had fattened in his father's villages. Decidedly Louboff was not of this class, hardly even Michel, although Michel had their eyes, and his lips, like theirs, were outcurled and sensual. Yet his senses told him she was of their race. But what did it matter? He flattered himself with the decision that, after all, beauty was always beauty, removing barriers, effacing prejudices, always a law unto itself.

"But why do I worry about this?" the young Russian asked himself scornfully. "What is Louboff Malkiel to me? She was a stranger to me an hour ago, and an hour hence——"

Just then Louboff laid her hand on his arm, and even through the thickness of his fur coat, the mere contact of her fingers caused his blood to run riot in his veins.

Then a great horror took possession of him. He thought of his mother, and a dozen contingent ideas scurried through his brain. They had reached the Corps des Mines, and an overmastering desire to fly, to save himself while there was yet time, took possession of him.

Hastily he sought in his mind for some excuse.

“Oh,” said Michel at his elbow, “here are some friends of mine. Do take Louboff in and show her the collection. You can do it so much better than I.”

Boris looked helplessly from brother to sister, and caught a soft, expectant glance from Louboff’s widely opened eyes.

“Of course, of course; with the greatest pleasure,” he stammered; and the scene of that moment—the snow-covered streets dazzling in the sunshine, the golden dome of St. Isaac’s shining across the river, the blue of the sky above, and Louboff, adorably lovely in her muffling furs—was stamped forever on his memory.

“Kismet, kismet,” he said to himself as Louboff and he entered the great red building together.

Michel ran up the steps after them and laid a detaining hand on his sister’s arm.

“Do not forget,” he said in Hebrew, his face white in its earnestness.

A shiver of horror passed over Louboff as she caught the cunning and elation of her brother’s glance and realized its cause. Nihilism in theory sounded all right, and there were moments when revenge prompted her to any action—moments when the wrongs committed against her race raised her indignation and fury. But Nihilism in practice?

She drew her breath hard and in very pain at the thought. Once, in the Nevsky, she had seen a bomb thrown at a Minister in his carriage, and the bits of torn flesh, the dismembered limbs, the smell of blood and powder had been an object lesson which haunted her memory frequently.

Yet this was about to happen again and perhaps through her agency. For a moment faintness overcame all her senses and the shadows of impending disasters seemed to gather thick about her.

“Oh, the mystery of the cruelty of things!” she thought despairingly, as the truth of the English poet’s line beat itself maddeningly into her reason and left her sick in mind and body.

CHAPTER IV.

Very much agitated, nervous always, yet excited and pleased by turns, Boris Alexanderowitch began a tour of the show-cases in the Corps des Mines. He opened by telling Louboff that it was one of the most wonderful collections in the world, second only to that of the British Museum.

Finding that she was listening, all attention and interest, he warmed to his subject, and began to discuss learnedly on the values and qualities of beryls and tourmalines and the beauty of the most complete collection of turquoises to be found anywhere.

“There,” he added, his blue eyes twinkling with patriotism, “we beat the British Museum out and out.”

When they paused before the great nugget of gold from the mines on the eastern slopes of the Ural, he was well pleased to see that it failed utterly to impress her, scarcely seemed to interest her. It seemed to him another proof of her un-Jewish temperament. She gave one careless glance at it and continued talking of the supposed qualities of ill or

good luck attributed to certain stones and professed a great belief in the pretty superstition.

"You see," she said, baring a lovely hand, "I always wear a turquoise."

"You have luck in love? Does it bring it to you?" he asked anxiously.

"No," she replied with a coquettish flash of her eyes that electrified him. "But I hope it will some day."

Two hours passed easily. Boris found she had read her brother's text-books to advantage and had read them thoroughly. She was interested in all the subjects that interested him, and could match opinions with him learnedly.

Only when the last of the collection had been thoroughly criticized and scrutinized did they think of going; but on reaching the entrance hall Michel was nowhere to be found. Boris sent an attendant through the building to search for him, and when the man returned to report failure, Louboff said laughingly:

"Well, Boris Alexanderowitch, it looks as if my dear brother has deserted me, so I suppose I must trouble you to take me home."

"Your brother is evidently a very good——" began the young Russian gal-

lantly. Then he paused awkwardly, horrified at the fact that he was about to call a Jew "friend."

Louboff looked up at him suddenly and the change in his face and its perturbation gave her a keen pang. Boris just then hailed a passing *iswostschik* and was about to make a bargain, when Louboff said pleadingly: "Let us walk; the air is good and my fur shoes are light. We can cross the river at St. Isaac's."

Quite close to them stood the official who had followed her earlier in the day from St. Isaac's, and Boris noted the malice in her tones and wondered if she wanted to punish him by this proposition of walking, having understood why he had hesitated in calling Michel friend.

He determined not to let her see he understood her manoeuvre and, although like all Russians he hated walking, he said affably:

"As you please, Louboff Antonivna. I shall be delighted."

The matter being settled, Boris smiled down at her in a way that made her heart beat quicker and caused her to glance away hastily over the river because of the deepening flush in her face.

Under their snow shoes the frozen and

caked snow crunched and crackled, and the frosty air made their noses tingle. They walked several yards without speaking, then all at once Louboff plunged into a conversation anent the persecution of her race, and Boris turned and looked at her, startled, wondering if she could be a mind reader, trying to answer the many cruel and ignoble questions just then puzzling his brain. It was marvelous, he told himself, and at first he listened impatiently, with that impatience born of incredulity; then he grew half angry. He was too polite to say he disbelieved her, so he answered in derisive "oh's," and "ah's" until Louboff taxed him openly with discrediting her assertions.

"Oh, no; oh, no," he replied with an evident show of irritation, "but there are always two sides to a question, and you only see your own."

"Let me make it plain to you," she pleaded, "and I will gladly hear your answer. I will tell you only of things within my own knowledge—of things I know, things that happen constantly in my own house."

He shrugged his shoulders. "But what good will it do? What good have words ever done?"

“A great deal,” she replied spiritedly. “If my judgment is right and you are the man I think you are—well——”

Her tone was flattering; her voice dangerously sweet and seductive. Her glance alone would have vanquished a man far less generous in sentiment than he, as she paused, watching him intently.

“I am listening,” he murmured with averted eyes.

Several times her voice broke in its earnestness as she related how her father, a merchant of the second guild, was at all times subjected to impositions. She told him how officials came to him with demands whenever they saw fit for one thousand roubles or ten thousand roubles, as the case might be, and how he was forced to pay and keep silence or lose all chance of doing business. When she had finished she looked up at him, and the glance of his eyes, stony and hard, met hers unflinchingly.

“Well, Louboff Antonivna, your father must be very rich, and if he pays this tribute, he knows his business. He must have some good reason for paying it; he must gain his wealth through usury.”

Expecting a totally different answer, she

flushed with disappointment and chagrin.

"It may be; I don't know," she faltered.

Boris noticed the flush and smiled. At once a picture of her father, a lean and hungry Jew, rose up before his mind's eye.

"Oh, the beast!" he thought vindictively. "Of course he is a usurer; all Jews are usurers. Which of them ever gave us Christians quarter? Don't they squeeze us and harass us to death when they have the chance?" and instead of sympathizing with Louboff over her father's persecution, he felt glad of it.

Then he told her of his father's grievances.

They walked slowly and more slowly, wrapped up in themselves and their subject.

Louboff listened to his frank and open denunciation of her race, her lovely face growing more and more troubled, till finally Boris caught the expression and stopped short in the middle of a sentence.

"Oh, what does it matter!" he said with a nerveless laugh. "What have you and I to do with so deep a question? See how beautiful the world is about us."

"Oh, but we have. We have," she broke in tragically, "we ought to do what we can to straighten it."

She winced as he said quickly, again becoming serious:

“Straighten it? No. There is no way to straighten it, believe me, dear Louboff Antonivna. There is not room in Russia for our two races; that is all.”

“You would banish us as a people?”

“Yes, as a people—all but you, Louboff Antonivna.” The rich tones of his voice softened and quavered. “I would keep you.”

The earnestness of youth was in the added sentence, and despite the fact that it could have been uttered as a polite compliment, banal and meaningless, to her sex and beauty, Louboff felt he meant it, as for one brief second they gazed breathlessly into each other's eyes.

Then slowly the implied compliment to herself was forgotten and only the insult to her race remained. She bent her head to hide the tears of vexation that rose to her eyes.

Boris saw them and grew sorry. He blinked his eyes and bit his lips, in anger at himself.

“But why,” he went on in a tone that he meant to be gay, but which sounded overstrained and false, “need we worry over such things? When Jews and Russians are alike

forgotten, the world will still go on. Forgive me, Louboff Antonivna," he added, bending toward her tenderly, "I spoke too candidly. Why do you care?"

"Because," she ejaculated quickly and with a passion Oriental in its abandon, "I hate to belong to a race despised. I hate it! I hate it! The humiliation, the senseless misunderstanding, the injustice. Why should you hate, despise us, loathe us? I don't hate Christians. I am too liberal or too foolish," she added bitterly.

"But, Louboff Antonivna, I don't hate you." He dwelt on the pronoun lingeringly, fondly, and looking up she met his eyes, earnest and sincere. Her own dropped quickly and confusedly.

"Yes, yes; what does it matter?" she said nervously, as she laughed a laugh that ended in a sob. A tear had frozen on her long lashes, and taking his handkerchief out, he brushed the frozen particle away.

"You will forgive me?" he begged anxiously.

"Why, of course," and the smile that she gave him was adorable in its coquetry and also its humility.

They had reached the crossing of the Neva,

and together they went down the wooden steps to where the sleighs stood awaiting passengers. Boris helped her into the first and a moment later a swift skater from behind was pushing them along.

As custom permits and enjoins in St. Petersburg, Boris put his arm about Louboff to keep her steady and safe in the sleigh. When she felt herself in his clasp she nestled closer, and as they sped along, the frosty air biting their faces, he felt angry with himself. She was so fragile and lovely, almost a stranger to him; why should he annoy and harrow her feelings? So he whispered as well as he could in the teeth of the wind:

“I have enjoyed our walk immensely.”

She smiled and nodded. The swiftness of their pace made talking impossible.

Arrived at the other side, Louboff looking back, saw the same official getting out of his sleigh. “He has tramped,” she thought gladly. “I can see his teeth chattering. And he will tramp again.” So she proposed to Boris that they continue their walk, and he, nothing loath to prolong a tête-à-tête that he was finding more and more delightful, acquiesced with evident satisfaction.

Night had fallen, and with the street lights

shining on it, the snow glittered and sparkled brilliantly. The picturesque *troikas* of the richer classes, with their blue and green snow nets, bells a-jingle, the horses harnessed in silver, gave color and movement to the scene.

Boris was determined not to let their conversation grow serious, so he began to talk of music and plays and therefore found out that Louboff had graduated from the Conservatorium and was a pupil of Rubinstein.

"Oh, yes," she said modestly, "I play. A piano house here is arranging a series of concerts for me in Germany, and I may go. I have already given concerts in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Warsaw. Rubinstein wishes me to play in Berlin."

"When?"

"Next month. I dread the ordeal."

Boris could not understand the sudden sense of dejection that came over him.

"Michel does not want me to go," she went on in her soft, melodious voice. "If I were only sure of success."

"Success! You need only look at your audience and you will be sure of it, unless they are blind," Boris thought quickly; saying instead, "If Rubinstein wants you to go, you

may be sure of success. But are you not going to play here first? I shall never rest now till I hear you."

"Well, that is very easy. You will dine with me to-night," she said hospitably, "and afterwards I will play to you all the Chopin Nocturnes and Preludes, or anything else you like—Schubert, Schumann, Beethoven, Brahms or Bach."

The Chopin Preludes and Nocturnes! The enchanting music of the Polish tone poet swept through his memory, and then he recognized the haunting something that had puzzled him in her beauty. Yes; the Preludes and the Nocturnes. These were what she reminded him of.

"Delighted, but——" His scattered senses returned, and out of his bewilderment there came caution. He hesitated. For nothing on earth, he decided, could he eat at the table of a Jew. He tried to think of an excuse.

"I have to dine at the house of my uncle, Count d'Annenkoff, but—if you will permit me to come later?"

"I will be charmed to have you," she said, smiling cordially, and again the Chopin themes and melodies chased each other through his brain.

They had reached the door and she gave him her hand. He bent over it and was about to raise it to his lips, thought a moment, and then dropped it with a bow.

CHAPTER V.

Just as Michel left Louboff with Boris and turned into Line Four, a tall man, wearing a long squirrel-lined cloak, or *shouba*, of black cloth, with a heavy astrakhan collar and cap to match, each hand thrust through the sleeve of his coat, came up behind him and murmured laconically:

“Number Fourteen!”

“I listen,” replied Michel, not without a start of surprise.

“Traktir Glouboff.”

“*Charasho.*”

The next moment the stranger had passed him and Michel continued on his way to his lodgings.

Traktir Glouboff. He knew the place well—a den in the Wasily Ostroff, where the members of his society met occasionally, only very occasionally—at most half a dozen times in the year, for some of them were watched, and to congregate in any number at any known rendezvous was to court arrest.

Michel felt elated. Boris was safe with Louboff, and although Louboff, with her artis-

tic temperament and refined tastes, might not prove as tractable or easily influenced as a woman of coarser fibre, still he flattered himself that when it came to a climax she would stand by him to the end and give every assistance in her power.

He hurried along to his studies, completed these to his own satisfaction, ate a scanty dinner, and then sallied forth to his rendezvous at the Traktir Glouboff, which was to take place between six and seven—the dinner hour in St. Petersburg—the one hour in the day, as the conspirators well knew, when the police were the most likely to relax their vigilance.

Night had fallen, and Michel shuffled along in his heavy fur-lined rubber boots, hardly making a sound. He had a *bashlik* or hood of light brown woollen cloth tied down over his peaked student's cap, the long ends doubled over his mouth and tied back of his neck; this with two motives: the one and most important, to conceal his features; and the other to keep his ears, chin and forehead from freezing, the cold being intense.

The sky above was leaden hued; not a star was visible, and there was a flurry of snow in the air. The other side of the river with

its churches and palaces, its throng of gaily caparisoned horses, its *troikas* and equipages, its numerous electric lights, was always a brilliant picture at night, but in the dimly lit streets of the Wasily Ostroff things were gloomy and cheerless, and there was always little life and less movement. The farther Michel went down the Line the poorer and more desolate grew the aspect of the streets. Tall factories grew frequent, and the lodging houses of the students gave place to the meaner houses of the working classes and the moujik.

Except for an occasional janitor wrapped in his sheepskin and half asleep on his wooden stool by the door, Michel met no one. Through the double windows of the houses the young Jew caught many a glimpse of humble but happy interiors; of women, buxom, cheery and laughing, their brilliant kerchiefs tied over smoothly parted straw-colored hair; of men in red blouses belted over velveteen breeches, their bull-like necks showing ruddy under thick locks that looked as if they had been cut under a bowl; children were everywhere, and the whole family, from the youngest to the oldest, sat by the stove, sipping tea out of long glasses or eating black bread.

Michel again and again caught the glow of the red lamps hung before the ikons or holy pictures, without which no Orthodox home exists in Russia, and the sight of these and of the people uniformly contented and happy angered him and disgusted him.

"The devil take them," he murmured to himself. "They are satisfied. They are as pigs wallowing in their own mire; they pray to their saints and their images for their so-called 'little father,' the Tsar, and if they were free to-morrow to what purpose would be our sacrifices? What slaves they are! Slav! How truly their name befits them."

He reached the tavern, passed within, and, ordering a glass of tea, sat down to wait. Again he noticed the contented and jovial countenances of the men about him, and he scowled. They were drinking and telling stories. Hoarse shouts of laughter rang in the smoke-filled room, and the mien of all bespoke at least contentment. In repose some of the faces were sad. But they were a well-fed, warmly clothed lot. They had their tea, their pipes; some of them their *balilakas*—an instrument of the mandolin order—to accompany their songs; Michel, studying them, communed with himself, and his wrath grew.

He finished his tea and was lighting a cigarette when a stout man, evidently different in calibre to the frequenters of the place, entered. This man sat down opposite Michel and after a while apparently dropped into conversation with him, as one would with a stranger. He, too, ordered tea, and when bending over the table to get a piece of sugar, said *sotto voce* and in French:

“Look out for the moujik near the door. He has a wig on, and I think is Tretiakoff, of the Secret Police.”

After a while Michel turned round and gave a swift glance at the moujik.

“Yes,” he replied by a nod of his head, and a downward blink of his eyelids.

“I thought so. Well, leave now and return fifteen minutes later. Come in by the back door, to the room upstairs.”

Michel stood up at once, paid the few kopecks owing, and left. A quarter of an hour later, to the second, he had entered a hallway in a house on the next street, and, reaching the Traktir Glouboff by a covered passageway, went direct to a room on the second floor.

A man outside the door admitted him, and he found himself in a long, low-ceilinged room

of unpainted wood, roughly and scantily furnished. His friend of the Traktir, known as Number Ten, was there before him with some half dozen others.

On entering the room, Michel, whose sense of proportion and distance was keen, looked about him somewhat dazedly. The room was the bedroom of one of the party known as Number Four, a room Michel often visited; but on this occasion it seemed strange, smaller, and he looked about him in wonder.

Around and about he glanced inquiringly, puzzled. Everything seemed as it had always been, and yet he could not shake off the feeling of there being something different. Then the party settled down to business and he quickly forgot his first sensations in the discussion that ensued. It was conducted in earnest tones, and Number One, the leader, spoke in acrid accents of their utter failure in reaching the Tsar.

"Well," said one of those present as he balanced his cigarette between the first and second fingers of his left hand. "What would you have us do? Kill the Tsaritsa?"

"God forbid," said Number One.

"Then what can we do? She never leaves him. He was, as you say, driving unattended

on the Quay of the Nobles, but she was with him. She was with him on every occasion and she will continue to be with him."

"Except on this journey to Moscow."

It was Michel who spoke, and his voice vibrated with enthusiasm and excitement.

"Yes, except on this journey to Moscow," echoed Number One. "But that takes place when?"

"I think I can find out."

All eyes were directed toward Michel. Then in rapid, uneven accents he formulated his plans and told of his hopes.

Number One stroked his beard. "It seems possible," he said quietly, as he began tearing several lengths of paper. These he put in a bag handed to him by Number Four, and silently those assembled drew one each.

Michel was the last, and he drew the only one of great length.

As he gazed at the slip his face grew ashen pale, then changed to a deep scarlet, and the pulse in his throat beat so that Number One, facing him, could see it.

"Your nerve fails you, little one?" asked the latter, half tauntingly, half playfully.

"No, by the God of my fathers, no!" cried Michel, standing up, his eyes flashing. "Give

me your orders now—now,” he repeated. “I am ready.”

“But circumstances are not.” The cold, clear tones of Number One’s voice penetrated Michel’s brain dimly and dampened his enthusiasm. Michel dropped back into his seat and for a moment the room reeled about him and great beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead. With an effort, he fumbled for his cigarette case, chose a cigarette, and managed to light it with an unsteady hand.

The others were watching him closely. One of the members gave a great sigh. The boy looked so young, so fragile; it was hardly possible he could realize the promises he had made. Then Number One, who had meanwhile been pondering ways and means, began to give his directions; short, clear and precise.

There would be no further meeting for Michel. Number Four was to bring a bomb to Michel’s lodgings and Michel was to use it as he saw fit.

The meeting terminated informally. Number Four brought forth a bottle of vodka, distributing small glasses to each of his guests. He filled these glasses, then, lighting cigarettes, the guests went away one by one, hav-

ing first called to the doorman who stood outside.

This latter individual, when all were away, went about putting the chairs in order; then he cautiously tiptoed to the landing, thoroughly scrutinized the badly lighted, evil-smelling stairs, for any loiterers, and returning to the room he drew his hand uncertainly along one side of the wall.

There was a creaking sound; part of the wooden partition moved backward, and out of the aperture stepped two distinguished individuals in plain clothes, their faces grim but contented—two men known through the length and breadth of all Russia as the cleverest and most daring emissaries of the Tsar's Secret Police.

"*Vashiprevoskaditeltsvo*," said the doorman with a low obeisance, "the way is clear, your servant has done his duty."

Taking a fifty-rouble note from his pocket, the older of the two men flung the blood money at the head of the bowing traitor.

CHAPTER VI.

Boris Alexanderowitch dined well, and much to his surprise was cordially welcomed by his uncle. Several important members of the government, with that informality which is characteristic of Russian hospitality, happening to have been in conference with Count d'Annenkoff, had been invited, and had accepted that invitation which is invariably extended to those whom chance or purpose finds in Russian homes at the dinner hour, so that the dinner table was unusually large and brilliant.

"Yes," said Count d'Annenkoff in the course of conversation to the Gorodanachalnik, or Governor of the City, "there is a great deal of disaffection just now among the students; my nephew Boris here may perhaps have something to say on that subject. He is a student of the Corps des Mines."

Finding all eyes turned toward him, Boris broke off a conversation with his cousin Vera.

"I—I—have not observed anything, your Excellency," he replied unsteadily, in answer

to a somewhat gruffly worded question put to him by the Governor.

“How is that?” interposed Count d’Annenkoff with the polished politeness of his best diplomatic manner, and a smile steely in its coldness. “There are several members of a new secret society right in your class; in fact——”

The Governor gave Count d’Annenkoff a warning glance and the latter hesitated and then added blandly:

“You are devoting yourself too thoroughly to your studies, I suppose.”

“I am,” Boris replied quickly, then he added proudly, “and in any case, knowing my connections, my views and my sentiments, you can readily suppose that no matter what may be the secret intentions of my classmates—if they be as you state—I am the last person they would divulge their plans or intentions to.”

“The boy is right,” said the Governor bluntly.

“Perhaps,” Count d’Annenkoff remarked with a shrug, “but their zeal for proselytizing may get the better of their good sense, and if so, Boris, you will, of course, listen to all they have to say and inform us.”

The young man's face flushed darkly.

"I—would hardly like to do that, *mon oncle*," he said after a short pause and very positively, "it savors too much of espionage—of underhand dealing. I——"

"Ah, you think so?" murmured his uncle blandly. And with a short, disagreeable laugh, General Gresser, the head of the Secret Police, remarked *en passant*. "You would treat these *canaille* as gentlemen?" Then looking around the table, he said sarcastically: "Your Excellencies, we certainly cannot look to Count Gourowsky for any information on this subject."

The tone of the General's voice was ominous and pointed, and judging by the quick frown given him by his uncle and the glances he met on all sides, Boris became painfully aware that he had keenly displeased all those present by his answer. He threw back his head indignantly.

"What do you want of me?" he asked, unabashed. "I am no detective to spy on my friends."

"But you are a loyal subject of his Imperial Majesty?" queried the Governor with emphasis.

"Most certainly."

“Boris,” said Count d’Annenkoff in a tone one would use to a naughty child, “that will do.”

Puzzled and annoyed by the incident, Boris, a moment later finding himself ignored, continued his interrupted talk with his cousin and forgot the incident.

Dinner over, making his excuses to his aunt, who did not interrupt her conversation with a high State dignitary, but gave her nephew the tips of her fingers languidly and almost disdainfully, he hurried from the palace and found himself after a short drive before the house of Louboff Malkiel, on the Moika.

Once there, for several minutes he stood outside, hesitating about entering. A whole army of prejudices seemed to halt him. He thought of his parents, and dead and living hands seemed stretched out to retard his progress. What was he doing? Ignoring his mother’s warnings and even her commands; forgetting the principles his dead father had so carefully instilled into his mind. To enter the house of a Jew as a guest! he, Boris Gourowsky? It was incredible! What was he doing? What sense was there in it?

Were not the Jews the bitterest enemies of his race, the curse of his country, the mockery of his religion? He coughed and frowned impatiently, then Louboff's flower-like face rose before him and the desire to see her again, to know more of her, grew with him.

"Bah!" he said to himself impatiently. "I am going in to hear her music; what harm is there in that? The Jews have always been musical; Rubinstein himself is a warm friend of the Tsar, and of all the Grand Dukes; he used to be a friend of my father's. Why should I hesitate about seeing Louboff? Principles and prejudices are all very good at times, but there comes a moment when to push them becomes silly. It is the music—it is Louboff the musician, and not the Jewess, I go to see," was the thought that consoled him and swept away the last fragment of his hesitancy.

He pushed open the door, saluted the *dvornik* carelessly, and then walked upstairs trying to feel comfortable and at ease with his conscience.

Seeing the name "Malkiel," he rang a bell and a servant opened the door. Taking his coat and cap from him, he ushered Boris into

a plainly furnished living room where two elderly persons of decided Jewish cast, a man and a woman, were playing cards.

The former got up nervously on catching sight of the tall, soldierly young man, then he came forward civilly, and when Boris introduced himself, Mr. Malkiel murmured his own name and with a backward movement of his head to his partner, who still held her cards in her hands, said laconically: "My sister."

Boris Alexanderowitch smiled at seeing so many expressions in the face of the Hebrew before him; first fear, then caution, then surprise, then gratification.

"You thought I was after your wealth; one of those that Louboff told me of to-day. Well, I am glad you were frightened, if only for a second. How many unfortunate victims have you squeezed in your time?" Boris thought to himself maliciously, even while he bowed politely.

Then Michel came in, after him a servant with a samovar, and last of all, Louboff, demure and lovely in a gray frock.

Boris refused the glass of tea Louboff offered him, on the plea of just having finished dinner, but as she insisted, he took

it and put it on a small table; then he sat down on a stiff chair and began to study the first Jewish family with whom he found himself on terms of comparative intimacy.

“How horrible! How horrible they are!” he thought disgustedly. “The old man Malkiel cannot look me straight in the face, and his sister, fat and greasy, ugh, how ugly!”

Boris grew more and more ill at ease. He began to upbraid himself for coming. The guttural accents, the whine in their voices and the peculiar gestures of hands and arms grated on senses otherwise attuned. In desperation, he turned to Louboff and tried to ignore them. But they would not be ignored. They plied him with questions, and the elder Malkiel, stretching forth a long, thin hand, grabbed that of Boris Alexanderowitch, and touching a handsome cabochon emerald ring which the latter wore and which had belonged to his father, said with envious delight:

“Oh, the beautiful emerald! A most rare stone. I have never seen such a stone, and emeralds are so dear now that ring must be worth fifty thousand roubles easily. If ever you need money, well——”

Boris' nerves seemed at the point of crack-

ing. Sell his father's ring? Boris almost snatched his hand away.

Louboff knew her father was doing his best to be polite, for to comment on his possessions, to value them highly, to a Russian Jew, is to gladden him exceedingly, but she saw the scorn and anger in Boris' face and not quite understanding why it should be there, she stood up hastily and said:

"Father, we will not disturb your game. Come, Boris Alexanderowitch, I promised to play for you. The music-room is quite a distance, at the other end of the apartment, so that my practising will not disturb the family. You will come, too, Michel?" she added, turning to her brother.

"In one second," he assented.

As they went along Boris was struck by two things—the largeness of the apartment and the increasing luxury of its furnishings.

From the first room they passed into another similar in character, then into a well-stocked library with magnificent black carved Norman oak furniture and hangings of yellow satin; from that to a salon with Louis Seize decorations, all gilded mirrors and whiteness, then through a smoking room luxuriously appointed in Oriental style, fol-

lowed by a dining room of magnificent proportions, where rare old silver, family portraits, Flemish furniture, rugs, porcelain, cut glass and splendid coppers gave an air of opulence and luxury that came as a surprise to the tall young Russian.

This room led into a music-room, the walls of which were done in panels, the polished floor reflecting the Chippendale furniture. Here and there priceless rugs were placed, great jardinières of palms, or roses in full bloom, and some bowls of old Crown Derby filled with bunches of lilies and violets perfumed the air delightfully.

In old cabinets were housed Louboff's collection of original manuscripts and autographs, and the oval mirrors had candelabra filled with unlighted wax candles.

A harp, several violins, a violoncello, a double bass, quaint *balalikas*, some guitars, lutes and mandolins, with an organ and two grand pianofortes, completed the furnishing of a room that delighted Boris Alexandero-witch. He could not keep back an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Ah, you like my room," she said, laughing. "You see, it is at the end of the apartment, away from the living rooms, so that the

others may not be disturbed by my practising."

"It is indeed beautiful," Boris said.

"Much better, at least, than the one we left," she continued. "That is kept ugly for papa's tormentors. You see, we dare not keep anything pretty or valuable where it could be seen, for one of your Russian officials would be sure to pounce on it and order it sent to his home."

Boris looked incredulous.

Louboff Antonivna noted this and shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, you don't believe me. Well, never mind; I assure you it is true, alas." Then she went over to the pianoforte nearest her and seating herself, said questioningly: "What shall it be, preludes or nocturnes? I am in humor for either."

Without waiting for his reply, she began to wander from key to key, and over her lovely face there came a rapt expression that absolutely glorified it.

Boris stood at the end of the pianoforte, without troubling to find a seat, so absorbed was he in the music. Like pearls the notes of the first prelude fell under her fingers. From prelude to prelude she passed, playing

the last more beautifully, it seemed to him, than the one before. And all the time she warmed more and more to her work.

Boris had all the Russian's inborn love of music; trained to it and understanding it, he listened entranced. He kept his eyes fixed on her bent head, against its background of roses, and hardly dared to move. Amaze-ment and delight and, finally, an ever in-creasing enthusiasm, took possession of him.

"She is not only beautiful and clever, but she is an artist," he told himself. "What does it matter, with that gift, her being a Jewess? And I, with my prejudices and notions, came near losing all this! She will go to Berlin, to London, to Paris, and how they will fête her."

All that is beautiful in Chopin's music; the pathos, sadness, revolt; the beatings of a heart that knew love in its subtlest and most ethereal phases, with all the consequent longings, bitterness and outbursts of suprem-est joy, were revealed in Louboff's music; and then her technique, its finished elegance and completeness were not lost on Boris.

"Michel is only twenty and she is younger. She cannot be over eighteen. It is marvel-ous, unbelievable," he pondered.

Louboff had reached the great E flat prelude. She commenced it with splendid bravura. Her flying fingers seemed to sweep the keyboard. Then suddenly they struck a false note. She looked up at him and frowned.

It was the first false note and the only false note, but it annoyed her and sent the blood flying to her face. For a few moments she sang the joyous melody, and Boris listened and looked and found the maddest ideas rushing through his brain in tune with the music.

The ecstasy and dreaminess of it all! When the last note was struck, she turned to him, tired and happy. He rushed up to her, caught her two hands, and raising them to his lips, covered them with kisses.

"Oh, Louboff Antonivna, you play divinely! You have given me the greatest happiness of my life."

She listened, blushing. "It is so good of you to say so," she whispered.

"Good!" he echoed in amazement. "But where did you get it all; surely not on earth?"

"Anything that is good in my playing belongs to Rubinstein—our great Rubin-

stein," she said with a smile adorable in its malice; "yet, he is a Jew."

"Oh," said Boris, laughing outright, "you cannot forget that."

"No, I cannot."

"Ah, Louboff Antonivna, you make me feel ashamed. There are Jews and Jews; I really see I have been making a mistake. Perhaps if I listen to your beautiful music much longer I shall come round to your way of thinking."

Louboff's impulses were always gracious. Again she gave him both her hands.

"Boris Alexanderowitch, you are atoning nobly; if only some day you might."

Boris smiled enigmatically, and at that moment Michel entered.

"It is snowing hard," he announced gleefully. "It looks as if you would have to remain here. Those students' rooms of ours are so bleak and comfortless. I certainly will not go to the Wasily Ostroff to-night. What do you say, Boris Alexanderowitch, had you not better remain?"

"Thank you, I am not afraid of cold," the latter said, rising; "and if it is snowing hard I had better be going. Some other time, Louboff Antonivna, if you will

allow me, I would like to come again."

"Oh, any time," she assented graciously. "But won't you stay? The Nicholaïffsky Bridge is bad at all times, but to cross it on a night like this——"

"I shall think only of your music."

"You must not count on it to perform miracles," she insisted, archly.

"The memory of its magic will banish all discomfort."

Leisurely they walked through the suite of rooms to the outer hall, pausing here and there for Boris to note or admire some piece of china, a picture or rare curio.

She arranged to take him the following evening to Rubinstein to dinner, and he arranged to take her in the afternoon to the service in St. Isaac's.

He was glad to find the old people had finished their game and had retired for the night. Their presence had been the only discordant note of the evening. It was quite ten minutes till Boris finally ended his adieux.

"*Au revoir*, Boris Alexanderowitch," she said, her head outside the door, as he descended the staircase, her eyes bright and shining, her face flushed with happiness and excitement.

"*Au revoir et a bientôt*, Louboff Antonivna," he replied, and the smile each gave the other was magical in its effect.

Only when his footsteps had died away and ceased did Louboff close the door, then lingeringly and preoccupied, she went toward the sitting-room. A peremptory call from Michel made her finally hurry.

"Well," he said, when she reached the room where he was, "you managed pretty finely. What do you think yourself?"

Her face changed as she shrugged her shoulders coldly. "He is a great Jew hater; it all depends on what you want me to do."

"That I will tell you later."

"Do not count on much; you might as well try to corrupt the Tsar himself as the incorruptible Boris Alexanderowitch."

"Corrupt?" he echoed laconically, and he gave her a glance of surprise that confused her.

"Well, bring him to your way of thinking," she stammered.

"Love is a mighty leveller of prejudices, and you—you made a decided impression on him, and he—he made a decided impression on you, *ma belle*."

"Nonsense!" cried Louboff angrily.

Then, eager to change the conversation, she said crossly: "I hope your plotting does not get me into trouble. We were followed from the Corps des Mines right across the river here."

Michel bit his lips. "You were, eh? Well, as long as you did not deliver the papers, and you were not arrested, and found with them, it is all right," said Michel, yawning. "You don't want to have another try at delivering them to-morrow? They are two passports for men that are in grave danger."

"Most assuredly not."

Again Michel glanced at her sharply.

"What! Has Boris Alexanderowitch made a proselyte already?"

"No, but I am not going to run any such risk. No theory or fact is worth the sacrifice of a human life or human liberty. I won't ever go on such a mission again."

"Not for a while; you would make a bad envoy if you invite surveillance so easily," sneered Michel. "There is one point I wish you would try and find out from Boris Alexanderowitch to-morrow," he added, trying to make his tone light and inconsequential. "Does his uncle leave Petersburg Thursday or Friday?"

“Because Count d’Annenkoff goes with the Tsar?”

“Because nothing at all, Mademoiselle,” retorted Michel sarcastically, but the expression of his face changed instantly and she saw it. Then after a pause during which brother and sister glared at each other, Michel said sneeringly:

“Go to bed now and get your beauty sleep, and dream, if you like, that you are Countess Gourowsky.”

Louboff tossed her head indignantly, nevertheless the sound of the name was pleasant to her ears.

“An impossibility—an utter impossibility,” she told herself. “Still, life is full of them—and—if he wished it, ah, if only——”

CHAPTER VII.

When Boris Gourowsky left the house of the Malkiels his brain was in a whirl. No vehicle was in sight, so down the Nevsky, all along the Quay and over the Nicholaiffsky Bridge he trudged to the Wasily Ostroff, indifferent to the cold, the blinding snow that pelted his face like sand, and the gale blowing in wildly from the Gulf of Finland.

When he reached his lodgings he sat down to his nightly task; a letter to his mother. Ordinarily it was the pleasantest of duties, but on this occasion he got only as far as the opening phrase of endearment; then he paused.

Sitting, pen in hand, he pondered how best to tell her of Louboff, and her music, and how also he came to make her acquaintance; but the more he pondered the harder seemed the formation of the phrases with which to express his own ideas.

There was absolutely no use, none whatever, he decided at last. She would never understand, never, never. She would think the end of the world had come, that he, her

son Boris, was on terms of intimacy with a Jewish family. It would only annoy her, worry her, make a misunderstanding.

No, he had better wait; better say nothing at all. He sat going over the events of the evening, and Louboff's lovely face in all its expressiveness, its haunting melancholy, its wistful repose, was ever before him.

His letter to his mother had brought memories of his home to him; he contrasted it with Louboff's home and found it for the first time sadly wanting. He wondered how Louboff would like Gourowsky. He fancied himself showing it all to her, walking by the lake, where the lilacs blossomed so beautifully in spring time. He thought of the place in the scorching summer, when acre after acre of ripening wheat lay golden in the sunshine, and again it was the weird, silent solitude of the moonlit woods in winter time.

The house, he told himself, would look very poorly furnished and uncomfortable to her. He thought of the old square pianoforte in the sitting-room; that, he decided, would have to go, and a grand pianoforte be substituted instead.

If he suggested such a change, how would his mother take it—his mother, who practised

the most rigid economy in order that she might build the schools his father was so set on. Then he lit a cigarette and laughed at himself as an imbecile.

“The little witch! She has hypnotized me with her music and her beauty. It is absurd, fatal; what am I thinking of?”

Outside, the wind whistled and howled, and he listened to it dreamily. Then a vision of Louboff converted to his faith, of Louboff a bride, his bride, came before him and he plunged his face in his hands.

“Am I crazy, or what?” he asked himself, horrified. “It would kill my mother; my father would turn in his grave—Louboff Malkiel, Countess Gourowsky! A Jewess in my mother’s place!”

He began to undress in a hurry, like one who tries to get away from his thoughts, and, putting out his light, he at last fell into a sleep filled with dreams of Louboff and her music.

Next morning when Boris found the unfinished letter to his mother and remembered that for the first in his student life he had disobeyed her commands, a great wave of remorse swept over him.

He thought of her far away in the interior,

far away from the joys of civilization, sacrificing herself completely for others, without relaxation or amusement or even comfort, and when he recollected that her one pleasure, for which a man drove daily some fifteen *versts*, his letter, had been denied her through his carelessness and selfishness, the recollection caused him a bitter pang of remorse and self-abasement.

He looked up at the care-worn face smiling benignly at him from her portrait; the glance of the gentle eyes seemed to pierce his soul. "And all for a woman whom I only met yesterday; a Jewess at that! Only because she is young and pretty!" he thought ashamedly.

"I do not deserve such a mother," he murmured to himself aloud, while a thousand instances of her kindness and thoughtfulness flitted before his mind's eye. He ran over the salient events of the dinner of the previous evening at his uncle's house, and sitting down he wrote a detailed account of the persons he had met, winding up with news of the bitter cold and the terrible snowstorm that had suddenly fallen on the city, hoping that the last item would account to her for the delay of his letter.

Boris then turned to his studies, but study and himself for once were altogether at variance. Calculations and mathematical problems swarmed before his eyes, a meaningless jumble of figures.

He would concentrate his interest only to find, the next instant, his thoughts wandering to Louboff, her music, or their digression on the Jewish question. He made his tea stronger than usual, smoked cigarette after cigarette, left his books and began pacing up and down his room, all in an effort to settle his thoughts and control his ideas; but his efforts were futile. Louboff's voice, Louboff's face, Louboff's personality would not efface itself; it followed him persistently, surrounded him, overwhelmed him.

He tried to laugh, to reason with himself, but thoughts of a future with her beckoned him and lured him in spirit. A future where the other half of him, that other half so dreamed of in youth, would be the girl he had met but a few hours previously, the Jewess, Louboff Antonivna.

The more he thought of this possibility the more the dreamer and fatalist, so strong in the personality of all Russians, asserted itself. "If it is love," he soliloquized, "well,

then there is nothing to be done; and if she loves me——”

The mere idea set his blood afire. He thought of her in her pretty abandon when she had given him her two hands to kiss; he thought of her as she had been when stirred to deep emotion by the loveliness of Chopin's music. He thought of her as she might be if, loving and loved, she would yield herself to his embrace in their betrothal kiss. Agitated beyond control by this thought, he tramped the floor of his little room heavily. A servant brought him his breakfast; he left it untasted. Then he began to count the hours.

Someone whom he was afraid might be Michel let himself in, and, climbing the two flights of stairs, knocked at his door, but receiving no answer, went to the rooms beneath—Michel's rooms.

One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock; how the hours lagged. At four o'clock he was to meet Louboff at St. Isaac's, and, finally, when the clock struck the quarter past three, he got into his heavy military coat and went out.

Once in the keen, frosty air he felt calmer.

“Maybe,” he told himself, as he trudged along in the snow, “she won't be the same as yesterday; maybe I will wake up to find it all

a dream, a fantasy. How can the mere thought of a woman work so much mischief, cause such havoc in one's feelings? Mentally and morally I am a wreck. I neglect my studies; I neglect my mother—the best mother of all mothers. What does it mean? I am not myself; I have lost my self-control, my will power; I am as one fascinated, bewitched, hypnotized; all the teachings of my father go down as snow before a fire. I must pull myself together. I must, I must,” he repeated vehemently to himself, and then he laughed. “But it is so good, the feeling so good, so natural,” and back again, unhindered and untrammelled, he let his thoughts rove to memories of the night before, singing snatches of the preludes to himself as he went along.

He was waiting in front of the great cathedral when he saw her sleigh turn the corner, and at sight of her his heart began to beat more rapidly.

He could feel the warm blood mount to his face, and when he felt the soft warmth of her gloved hands in his, as he assisted her from her swathings of fur, every nerve in his body thrilled with a new and exquisite pleasure.

“She is lovelier, lovelier by far, more ador-

able than I thought," he decided. "Ah, the world well lost for love! I love her. It is really love. She is my fate."

"Have I kept you waiting?"

The musical voice sounded a little tired and weary to his ears. It brought him back to earth.

"No, it still wants a few minutes to four. The service has not yet commenced."

"You will tell me what to do—I have never been to one of your services?" she said, with a tinge of alarm in her glance.

"Of course, I will tell you what to do," he whispered gleefully, and then they passed in, side by side, to the splendor and solemnity of the vast cathedral.

Boris bought two candles, and lighting them from the sacred taper, handed one to her; then crossing himself, Russian fashion, from right to left, he prostrated himself, touching the floor with his forehead.

Louboff stood by amazed, and the glance she gave him was one almost of scorn.

"Kneel, Louboff Antonivna," he commanded a moment later, and, obedient, she knelt.

Just then the music of the male choir echoed in the semi-darkness, and after a

while, Boris led her forward to the holy gate. Here they took their stand; Louboff, when her eyes, accustomed to the blinding glare of the snow outside, got their focus, taking in the luxury of color with delight, all the while feeling her senses beguiled with the harmonies floating dreamlike about her.

The music of the men's voices, deep, sonorous, penetrating, unaccompanied by instrument of any kind, rose and fell in cadences of exquisite beauty.

Louboff, Voltairian by instinct and education, cynical as to religion, found her soul suddenly bathed in a sense of peace and ecstasy, greater than she had ever known, different, too, in sort and condition.

She caught the glitter of precious stones in the sacred picture, the sheen of gold and silver and bronze; the softness of lapis lazuli and marble. The flicker of countless candles seemed to mesmerize her.

The voices of the priest and his attendants, the answering chorus of the singers, the whole wonderful tableau of the ceremonial caught her fancy and captivated it.

About her were old men and young women, children, monks and nuns, many with beautiful faces; all in attitudes of absorbed devo-

tion, and over all somewhere in the mystic beauty of the wonderful building the presence of a power, unknown, unrealizable, almighty, beneficent, gracious and just, hovered in majesty and made itself known to her.

The candle in her hand sputtered and shook because of her emotion; the air, heavy with incense, made her feel faint. All at once the scene seemed to fade farther and farther away and an impressive silence fell on the listening crowds as the sacred doors of the altar opened.

“It is the prayer for our Emperor,” whispered Boris at her side, and his face was illuminated with an emotion that transfigured it. His voice brought her back to reality.

“The prayer for our Emperor——” the words fell on her ear like a knell. Horror and execration! The prayer for a ruler that she loathed. The prayer for a ruler that oppressed her race so grievously. And she must listen to it!

Her blood ran cold, her heart beat maddeningly, and only by the supremest effort did she restrain herself from rushing out.

A priest came forward in the stillness, his gold and silver garments glittering in the candle light. Aloft he carried the sacred

volume, and in a deep basso that seemed to make the very air tremble he commenced a long recitative while the people prostrated themselves. He was answered by the choir, at first soft and sweetly, then in motives of triumph.

The service was over, and guided through the crowds by Boris Alexanderowitch, Louboff found herself outside in the darkness, grateful for the cold crispness of the snowy air. Around the cathedral all was bustle and confusion. Sleighs and troikas drove up with their bell-bedecked harness; a wonderful moonlight lit up the snow-covered city, and above, in the dark blue of the sky, innumerable stars twinkled coldly and brightly.

Boris found a sleigh and handed her in.

"How did you find it?" he queried, as he put his arm about her.

"Don't—don't ask me anything now," she begged nervously. "I want to think."

He acquiesced wonderingly, and in silence they drove to the house of Anton Rubinstein.

CHAPTER VIII.

On entering Rubinstein's study Boris Alexandrowitch was conscious of a dim, mysterious interior and a feeling of intense awe. About the "wizard" of the pianoforte, or the "demon," as many called him, strange tales had circulated in Russia.

In their sanest moments Boris Alexandrowitch was aware that artists were queer creatures, perverse, unsatisfactory, and whimsical; but press agents or silly friends had spread so many weird tales about Anton Rubinstein's temper, his fantastic ideas, his Tsar-like haughtiness, and his overwhelming personality and magnetism, that Boris, as he caught sight of the back of a bent figure with elbows on the writing table, brooding, melancholy, the light falling on the leonine head, so picturesque and powerful, experienced a strange thrill of fear, the thrill of one who comes face to face with something immutable and grandly majestic.

As he went forward he felt himself an intruder and an outsider before the shrine of

art, and his presumption at being there confused him.

"Is it you, Louboff? I know your step, do I not?" queried the great artist kindly, without troubling to turn around.

"Yes, Anton Gregoriewitch, it is I, and I bring you a surprise—the son of your old friend, Count Gourowsky: Boris Alexanderowitch."

Rubinstein rose at once, and first kissing Louboff on the mouth, the privilege of an artist; came forward, his left arm about her, and extending his hand, said with the stately courtesy so characteristic of him when host in his own house, as he bowed before the young man:

"Boris Alexanderowitch, you do me an honor; your distinguished father and I were old friends, and it gives me great pleasure to welcome his son."

Then releasing Louboff, he came closer to Boris, and placing his two hands on the latter's shoulders, said quickly.

"The image of your father, the very image. *Gott!* how time flies. Some twenty years ago I spent a summer at Gourowsky and you were an infant in long clothes. Bah! it makes one feel old and old age is the curse of mortals;

the curse that comes to us all with time." Then bluntly he demanded: "And how, may I ask, did you two meet?"

"Why, through her brother, a classmate of mine," replied Boris quickly, seeing that Louboff seemed taken aback by the question and mortified as well. Anton Rubinstein's surprise brought home to her the social gulf existing between her, a Jewess, and the aristocratic and highly connected Count Gourowsky.

"Ah," said the master, glancing from one to the other questioningly; then he went back to his seat by the writing table and, humming, drummed on the green baize of the table with his fingers, while Louboff talked to him of various musical events.

The utmost sympathy seemed to exist between master and pupil. Once he kissed her bare arm in the hollow of the elbow, and when he caught Boris' look of surprise and even displeasure, the great man smiled maliciously.

"When I kiss her warm young flesh I think of spring," he said musingly. "Ah, how wonderful is woman."

A guest entered: one of the Grand Dukes, and behind him Markoff, the painter, some half dozen followed in quick succession.

As the doorbell continued ringing, Rubinstein turned to his guests with a smile.

"It is lucky if we get anything to eat," he said with serio-comic gravity. "My man Matvè came to me this morning to know if I had any idea how many I might have. I hadn't, so he said as the weather was so bad he would only cater for twelve. We are fifteen already, and if some half dozen others arrive, and they may—it still wants five minutes to six—I am afraid starvation awaits us."

"Oh," said Louboff, "your cook, Anton Gregoriewitch, is always ready for an emergency; we have never yet gone hungry, and I know, for I dine here several nights a week," she added, turning to the Grand Duke, who, much to the annoyance of Boris Alexandrowitch, had succeeded so far in monopolizing her attention.

A few minutes later Rubinstein's solemn-faced servant appeared in the doorway.

"Your Excellency," he said, bowing to Rubinstein, and with an accent on the "Excellency"—a title then recently conferred on the great Russian composer by the Tsar—that caused Rubinstein to wink knowingly at the Grand Duke. "Dinner is served."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Rubinstein gleefully, and he jumped up, ran the fingers of each hand through his hair; then shook his head like a big dog, and putting his ever-present cigarette case in his coat pocket, went in through the salon, where two grand pianofortes stood, to the dining-room. Rubinstein led the way with the Grand Duke; the others following without ceremony.

At the head of the table Rubinstein stood a moment.

"Your Imperial Highness," he said, bowing to the Grand Duke, "you here," pointing to the place on his right, "and you, Mademoiselle, here," he added, nodding to Louboff, and indicating the place on his left; then turning to the others, he said with a comical gesture and a laugh: "Place yourselves as you will. I dare not take the responsibility of seating such a distinguished company. Painting or music, poetry or prose, which takes precedence? Fight it out among yourselves, ladies and gentlemen, and excuse me. I value my life and your friendship," he added, laughing loudly over his own little joke.

Boris Alexanderowitch was the first to step into the place beside Louboff, and with a

merry jest the others seated themselves, Rubinstein at the last moment commanding the painter Markoff to take the foot of the table, in order to separate two singers.

"Two tenori," he said with mock terror. "Markoff, you must separate them or there will be bloodshed. Markoff, you are big and burly, I beg of you be my vis-a-vis."

Contrary to Rubinstein's fears, and as Louboff had predicted, the dinner was excellent in every respect. Conversation was general and ranged over a variety of subjects: Tolstoi's book of the hour, the "Kreutzer Sonata," which, having been proscribed by the Russian censor, a copy in manuscript had been passed round among the author's friends, and having been read by Rubinstein and several of those at the table, was made the subject of an especially hot discussion.

"What rot it is," said Rubinstein emphatically. "Tolstoi knows as much about music as my cook. I have never known a novelist who could write intelligently on music, and if my advice were asked, it would be that the first rule all of them ought to follow is to leave music alone."

"Still," said a meek voice at the end of the dinner table, its owner a mystic and follower

of Tolstoi, "the psychological question is excellently and beautifully treated, and like all his works, the 'Kreutzer Sonata' is wonderfully written."

"Bah," said Rubinstein contemptuously, and with a quick show of irritation, "why call it 'Kreutzer Sonata?' Nevsky Prospekt would do as well and have as much meaning. A work like that is vicious; hundreds of ignorant readers will be misled as to the meaning of one of Beethoven's most beautiful works. Ah! the power of literature, who can fathom it. For this reason this MS. of Tolstoi's is a crime against art, and for the first time in my life I agree with the censor. As to the psychological question," he said, with a shrug expressive of great disdain, "well, everyone to his taste; to me his premises, his reasoning and his conclusions are ridiculous."

Arbitrary by nature, Rubinstein had a way of cutting short any conversation or controversy that worried him, and turning to Boris he began to ask questions about his mother and her work at Gourowsky.

Suddenly he turned to the table, and fixing his eyes on the Tolstoi advocate, he said loudly: "You talk of Tolstoi, you call him a great philosopher. What, may I ask, has

he done? I know of nothing on his part greater than many Russians, looking for no recognition, doing nothing but their duty, have done.

“Now, here,” he said, pointing to Boris, who looked up startled, and finding the gaze of all bent on him wonderingly, grew very red, “here, in the father of this young man we find a truly great Russian; a man who worked for his country and died for it. I speak of Count Alexander Gourowsky. Him I call a patriot, a builder of schools, a man who gave his time and his fortune to the greatest of all causes—the cause of education.”

There was a general assent; Rubinstein went on to relate incidents worthy of eulogy in the life of the dead Russian, and hearing his father praised, brought tears to the eyes of Boris Alexanderowitch.

The talk drifted to education, and Rubinstein, as head of the Conservatory, bewailed his difficulty in finding students willing to take positions in the interior or Siberia.

“No, no,” he cried angrily, “they huddle in the cities and starve, half of them, when they could do good elsewhere and be well paid for it.”

“Still can you blame them?” asked the

Grand Duke, his aristocratic features drawn in a faint smile.

“Surely I can and do,” Rubinstein retorted tersely and with a brusqueness to which the Grand Duke was evidently unaccustomed, judging by the shadow that flitted over his face, to be replaced instantly by an expression of haughty placidity. “He who cannot sacrifice himself for his art is no artist, and as Russians, the musical future of their country should be of paramount importance to every musician.

“We are only in our musical infancy,” he continued forcibly; then, pausing, he said in a lower tone, “the infancy of a giant. The future rests with us, and if only for this reason every young artist should be ready and willing to give ten years of his life to missionary work.

“Thirty years ago St. Petersburg was a musical Sahara, and were it not for the efforts of our beloved Grand Duchess Hélène, and the group of young artists she inspired, matters would be scarcely better to-day. Now, we are leaders; we have the finest conservatory in the world, and our composers compete with the greatest. That which has been done for St. Petersburg and Moscow remains to be

done for each of our cities. The people are hungry and thirsty for music; applications for teachers come to me from all over; abnormal salaries are offered, and I cannot supply the demand by half. Yet it is rather to the advantage of young artists than to their disadvantage, the getting away from a great city, away to the wilderness; there they can develop their gifts undisturbed, learn to rely on themselves, and if they only give ten years, why, then they could come westward with the money they could save and do as they please."

"But," said the painter Markoff, with a shrug of horror, "it would be as bad as imprisonment. You want martyrs, Anton Gregoriewitch, not artists; it would be a living hell."

"My dear Markoff," said Anton Rubinstein earnestly, "an artist, a musical artist, carries his heaven with him. Give a pianist his pianoforte, a violoncellist his violoncello, a violinist his fiddle, and you give him the best life has to offer."

"Anton Gregoriewitch," said a young man suddenly, whose pale face, disheveled locks and dreamy expression denoted the artist at once, "I will take that post you spoke of

to-day at Tobolsk, and I will take it at once. I will try to live up to your teaching."

A flash of exceeding joy illuminated Rubinstein's bright blue eyes. He stood up at once.

"*Camarade*," he said feelingly, "I drink to your health, and your success; we shall all drink to your health and your success."

For a few minutes the young man was the cynosure of all eyes, as those at the table, following Rubinstein's example, clinked glasses with him.

"A decision like that deserves an order," said the Grand Duke cordially. "Many have got it for far less, and I shall see that you get it, Pavel Petrowitch."

A burst of handclapping greeted the Grand Duke's statement.

A little later, Rubinstein gave the signal; dinner was over, and they trooped back; some remaining in the salon, others going to the study where Rubinstein, from preference, always sat.

After smoking a cigarette quite a number left, and Rubinstein was just about to suggest cards, when Pavel Petrowitch came up and stood hesitating beside him.

“What is it, my son?” asked Rubinstein affectionately, as he laid his hand on his.

“I must go soon. I shall have to catch the train for Moscow; to say adieu to my mother and pack up my things—but, Anton Gregoriewitch, do grant me one favor, I beg of you; let me hear you play just once before I go, to carry it as a last memory to the wilderness.”

Rubinstein pouted his lips like a child in anger, flung the hand he was holding away from him with that petulant annoyance that had given him the reputation of having a bad temper; he paused as if about to say something, while the others looked on expectantly, then he rose smiling, and went straight to the pianoforte.

A hush fell on the roomful of people; anywhere and everywhere they seated themselves.

Gasping at the audacity which prompted the request so unexpectedly granted, for Rubinstein disliked playing in his own house, Louboff ran forward to open the pianoforte and took her stand a little behind the pianist, the better to follow his pedaling and methods, till the Grand Duke, seeing she was without a seat, pushed forward the stool he was

sitting on and accepted a seat from someone behind him.

At the scratching sound over the polished floor, Rubinstein turned impatiently and frowned, then out of the trancelike stillness there came the tones of most searching beauty, the opening phrase of Chopin's *Balade in F*, with its oft repeated first notes, its entrancing harmonies and wild sweetness of melody.

Once, bending his head backward, to Loub-off, Rubinstein whispered gallantly in her ear:

“Thou, Louboff dearest.”

The subtle compliment, overheard by the Grand Duke and those nearest the pianoforte as Rubinstein intended it should, sent the blood flying to her cheeks till they were as red as the rose in her hair which Rubinstein had given her at dinner time.

“It is true,” he added, without a pause or break in the loveliness of his playing, “this melody is you.”

Then such was the beauty of that touch like unto no other, the most wonderful and magical gift—which has since passed into a proverb—that she and all the others lost all sense of time and place, even of their own

personality, as Rubinstein, full of the frenzy of his incomparable art, conducted them to realms of fancy outside things earthly and beyond reason.

The room was only dimly lighted, but silhouetted against the paneled walls, Rubinstein's massive head rose strongly; his face pale and demoniacal, his eyes half closed, his lips compressed, the marvelous fingers obeying unerringly the dictates of his extraordinary musical instinct.

The pathos-laden melody of the *Cantabile* rose and fell, now loudly, now softly; the harmonies here and there being accentuated as the genius of the player fancied, and those who heard him oftenest knew that Rubinstein was in the throes of one of his most inspired moments.

His fingers seemed rather to caress than strike the keys, and the very soul of the instrument responded passionately.

The beautiful *Cantabile* finished, at a tempo that took away the breath of his hearers, Rubinstein dashed into the maze of chords and chromatic passages following with a frenzy that was indescribable.

The pianoforte became an orchestra under his fingers, and all that was passionate and

temperamental in his nature seemed to have burst its bounds. The *Agitato*, the most poignant in music, passed in one mighty rush of sound, and then once more tender, palpitating with emotional beauty, wistful, heart-searching, the plaintive *Cantabile* sounded, grew fainter, still fainter, and finally died away in the veriest whisper.

Rubinstein waited for no applause. With head thrown back, sardonic of countenance and eyes gazing into space, he commenced to wander rhapsodically from key to key and at last began to play one of the Chopin *Mazourken*. His audience hung on each note. From mood to mood he passed, now grave, now gay, and those listening found the epitome of Poland's wrongs, Poland's woes, her sorrows, her greatness, and her inimitable poetry. Throughout, Rubinstein played so beautifully that a little Countess from Warsaw wept silently.

The *Mazourken* finished, he gave them the great Sonata in B minor, the stately Polonaise in F-sharp minor, and then his humor changing, he sought relaxation in some of the Preludes, passed from these to the Berceuse, and wound up with the Scherzo in C-sharp minor.

In the middle of the latter piece, Louboff caught sight of Matvè's head in the inner room. Stealthily and with footfalls as light as a cat, she crept there. Matvè had the samovar in his hand and was about to bring it in when she motioned him to take it back.

"But, *barishnya*," he whispered pleadingly, "it is nine o'clock and I have Anton Gregorievitch's strict orders."

"Hush! Hush!" said Louboff, and she pushed him back all the way leading to the servants' quarters. "I will tell you when to come; I will tell you when he is ready."

When she reached the salon, she looked anxiously at Rubinstein, afraid lest the evident charm under which Rubinstein was laboring so grandly might have been broken, but she saw he was oblivious to all happenings; living once again through the triumphs that had marked his appearance in every city of Europe.

"What a pity, what a great pity," she thought with a sigh, "we are so few to hear him! For less than this people have gone wild with enthusiasm, unharnessed the horses of his carriage to carry him on their shoulders through the streets and cheer him to the echo."

All at once he paused. "Well, sir," he asked of the young pianist, Pavel Petrowitch, "are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied? More than satisfied, as I have never before been satisfied, Anton Gregoriewitch, and still I would ask a favor. Let me hear your own Barcarolle—the Barcarolle in G-major."

Rubinstein shrugged his shoulders; then light as thistledown floated out the wonderful double notes, the song in the tenor rising clear and strong, triumphantly beautiful in its expressiveness, deeply tender in its pathos.

Over Rubinstein's mobile face as he finished there passed a shadow; he put his finger to his lips in thoughtful attitude, then he commenced the great Wanderer Fantasia of Schubert.

Tired with the emotions of the hour, Loub-off slipped away from her stand in the doorway, and with a smile of welcome Boris Alexanderowitch made room for her on the lounge in the study, over which a picture of Lermontoff's Demon hung.

A worshipper of Schubert, Rubinstein went through the Fantasia in a fashion that held his listeners breathless; bringing home to

them as it did, in piercing accents, the ineffable beauty, the nostalgia, the heartsickness, the wistful longing of a composition unique in its tone painting.

Slowly to all assembled the seconds laden with their divine harmony passed, and to many it seemed as if the beauty thrust upon their tense and straining nerves was more than their emotional natures could stand. From stage to stage Rubinstein led them on, and when he finished a stillness, prolonged, profound, greeted him as he rose from the pianoforte.

Rubinstein himself broke the spell.

"Well," he cried, laughing as he gazed at his audience, huddled together, speechless with delight and surprise.

They crowded round him to tell him of their gratitude, but he laughed again and waved them back.

"I played for myself to-night," he said; then an expression of ecstasy came over his face as he added solemnly, "Ah, music, music! You painters, and poets, and writers, you give us only part of things; we musicians give it all. The final word; that—that alone is ours."

A clock struck the hour of ten.

“Ten?” he said incredulously. “Three hours of music!” Then clapping his hands Eastern fashion he cried:

“Matvè, Matvè! Where is the fellow? How many times must I tell him I drink my tea at nine!”

Just then Matvè appeared, samovar in hand.

“Your Excellency, your Excellency,” he began, “it was the *barishnya*, she——”

“Yes, yes, blame me, Anton Gregorievitch,” Louboff cried, running up to him. “I sent Matvè away.”

Rubinstein caught her in affected but playful anger and crushed her head against his heart, then bent and kissed the top of her head affectionately.

“You meddle in my household affairs, you minx!”

Her hair caught in the button of his coat. Boris Alexanderowitch and the Grand Duke rushed to her assistance.

“See,” said Rubinstein, “what your vanity of woman does. Wear your hair short like mine.”

Some time later, after all had taken at least one glass of tea, and several more, the Grand Duke stood up.

“Anton Gregoriewitch,” he said bowing formally, every one standing up with him; “I know your inflexible rule: bed at eleven; it now only wants a quarter of that hour, so I must make my adieux.” Taking his host’s hand, he raised it to his lips, which Rubinstein tried to prevent, but the Grand Duke insisted, and as Rubinstein, as is the custom, kissed him on the forehead, the former said:

“Anton Gregoriewitch, thank you, and thank you again. This evening will remain in my memory forever, and be an always unsullied source of delight and artistic gratification.”

It was the signal for a general movement of separation. Five minutes later the antechamber was filled with departing guests, Matvè helping them into their *shoubas* and pocketing his *pour boire* with grateful alacrity.

Louboff remained to the last, and with her Boris Alexanderowitch. The latter was about to put on his cloak, when Rubinstein said quickly: “Don’t go; wait. There is still time, five minutes yet,” and he laid his open watch face upward on the table.

“Anton Gregoriewitch is the soul of punctuality,” said Louboff smiling. “His day is

divided into hours for this and hours for that."

"Don't forget, Louboff, to be here to-morrow evening. You will play the Kreutzer Sonata with Markowitch—everyone wants to hear the Kreutzer Sonata now, since Tolstoi discovered it, so much for fame—and if there is time I will go through your concert program for Berlin; you are practicing well, I hope?"

Before Louboff could reply, Rubinstein turned to Boris Alexanderowitch. "And you, sir," he said cordially, "do not forget that I am always at home for dinner, and will be delighted to see you as often and whenever you care to come here."

He looked from one to the other of the eager young faces bent toward him; then aloud and as one who speaks to himself, he ejaculated passionately: "God, what would I not give to be as young as either of you!"

"I——" said Louboff.

"We——" began Boris, searching for some remark to pass off the awkward silence that ensued.

"Come, children," said Rubinstein with a deep sigh, rising, "one minute to eleven." He walked with them to the door, waiting while

Matvè cloaked them. Just as they were leaving he called Louboff back and whispered something in her ear. She blushed rosy red, struggled from his embrace and fled to Boris Alexanderowitch.

Rubinstein stood laughing, his leonine face lit up with sardonic glee at her confusion.

When she reached the landing he shook his clenched fist at her, then Matvè closed the door, they could hear him bolting it, and the two young people, feeling very much excited and unusually happy, descended the staircase.

“What did he say, Louboff Antonivna?” Boris asked curiously.

“Oh, I cannot tell,” she replied, the fading blushes reappearing in her cheeks again. “He—he——”

“What?” insisted Boris coaxingly.

“He told me to beware of you.”

“To beware of me?” he echoed.

Louboff put her hands to her ears. “Oh, hush, hush,” she cried in distress, then she laughed in quite an hysterical fashion as they went out into the street.

The air was bitterly cold, the sky clear, the stars bright, and the moonlight deeply blue. Not a sound disturbed the silence of the nar-

row Troitsky Pereulok where Rubinstein dwelt.

Boris went forward and throwing off the fur coverings hiding a huddled figure in the bottom of the sleigh, the only sleigh in the street, said sharply:

"Hey there, you! What do you mean, my friend, sleeping here and your poor beast uncovered? You will roast in the hot hell for this, you hear me, I tell you so. A night like this to leave your beast uncovered!"

The *iswostschik* jumped to his feet, stiff and cold.

"Uncovered," he murmured, just catching the last word.

"Yes, and in this fearful cold; fifteen below zero, at least. Have you no heart for the dumb creature?"

"Oh," said the fellow stupidly. "Yes, it is cold, but Rurik is used to it."

"Used to it? Yes. He will drop dead at your feet some night he will be so used to it."

Until the poor animal had thawed out his frozen limbs they went slowly all the whole length of the Troitsky Pereulok, but as they turned into the Nevsky Prospekt and neared the Grand Ducal palace of Sergius, the animal took on a better gait.

All this way Boris said nothing, but at the Anitchkoff Palace, the residence of the Tsar, Louboff said quickly and almost petulantly:

“What is it, Boris Alexanderowitch? Why so silent?”

“Yes, and I have so much to say.”

He drew her closer. “So very much,” he added in French, “and yet so little, Louboff Antonivna, because——” he paused, trying to straighten out his thoughts, “you flurry me so; you have bewitched me.”

“Boris Alexanderowitch, you jest!”

Her glance was frightened; the solemnity of his tone had done this. Her whole body trembled beside him; he could feel her breathing in her excitement.

“No, I am in earnest, in deadly earnest, Louboff Antonivna. You have a terrifying—no, a beautiful, an adorable influence——”

“I, a Jewess? You, eh—all your ideas!”

“They are dead, Louboff Antonivna. They——” he tried to think of something to say, and finding nothing in his confusion of spirit, bent down and tried to catch her glance.

Suddenly he knew what he wanted to say, but the words absolutely refused to come to his lips. It seemed as if some spirit influence kept them back, froze them, ere they could be

spoken. The look on his face told of his desire.

Dazed, confused, more utterly frightened than ever before by the sudden rush of happiness that had overtaken her, Louboff gazed back at him, and the memory of his voice was sweeter to her ears than even the music of Rubinstein.

She could feel the warmth of his breath on her face.

"Is this real?" she asked herself ecstatically.

They had reached her house on the Moika and he was thinking of how he had hesitated only the evening before about entering it.

"Where shall I see you to-morrow?"

If she had doubted before, the tone of his voice and its intense eagerness, she felt convinced of his sincerity, for he kept her hand in his as they crossed the entrance hall.

"Meet me in St. Isaac's at ten."

Her ready acquiescence enchanted him.

"Yes, yes, at ten." Then he raised her hand to his lips and began kissing it.

"Boris Alexanderowitch, I hear a door open above; they expect me to come up. I must go alone."

He was about to kiss her hand again, but

she tore it quickly away and ran up the stairs.

Michel met her on the threshold of the apartment.

"Well, well," he cried, gazing into her lovely face, dazzlingly beautiful just then with its confused blushes and the unearthly brilliance of her large Oriental eyes, his own face white, pinched and excited.

"What is it?" she faltered.

"Did you find out?"

"What?" she gasped.

"The date of d'Annenkoff's departure?"

"Oh, Michel, I—I forgot!"

An oath, loud and terrible, fell from his lips.

"You traitor! You cursed snake!" he cried, his eyes blazing, his hand clenched threateningly as he rushed toward her.

CHAPTER IX.

“Tell his Excellency I have come on important business.”

It was nine o'clock, the day dark and gloomy with one of those leaden skies which make St. Petersburg, for months at a time, unutterably sad and dreary, driving all those who can get away to the sunny skies and warmth of the Riviera or the Crimea. The hour was unusually early for Russian custom: the better classes scarcely ever rising before noon.

The servant made a low bow to the Governor of the city—an official whose word is law and whose mere figure strikes terror to the hearts of the lower orders—and having removed his Excellency's sable-lined *shouba*, the man showed him into the study and then went to find Count d'Annenkoff's valet to learn if his master was awake or could be awakened.

“The Governor to see me!” cried the Count incredulously, as he glanced at the timepiece nearest his bed. “His Excellency? Good!

Tell the Governor I will be with him directly."

Count d'Annenkoff dipped a towel in perfumed water, drew it across his face, smoothed out his hair, wrapped the dressing gown handed to him about his portly form, and sat on the edge of the bed while his man servant drew on his hose and slippers.

All the time he was whispering to himself. "What can have happened? Alexei Alexeiwitch to be out of bed at this hour! Nine o'clock. This must be important business." And he began wondering what it could be.

A few minutes later he was shaking hands with his guest.

"Why, Alexei Alexeiwitch, this is a charming surprise. Ah, I see you have vodka. Can I offer you anything—some breakfast?"

"Thank you, no. A glass of tea with you, if you take it."

"Of course." And the servant lingering at the door went immediately to fetch the brass urn so characteristic of life in Russia.

"What horrible weather!"

Count d'Annenkoff looked up sharply. Surely his guest had not come to speak of the weather. It was disagreeable enough without discussing it.

"Yes. Horrible, horrible!"

"It will be a miracle if Melba can sing to-night. You go, of course?"

"Most assuredly. Who would miss Melba?"

Then the Governor began chatting of various social topics; and St. Petersburg is ever a seething pit of gossip. The Minister of the Interior heard him patiently, not showing his inward curiosity at the cause of so early a visit. A servant made tea and handed it to them, lit the candle on the writing table so that the two men could light their cigarettes without the effort of striking a match, and only when the door had closed behind the footman did the Governor cease gossiping.

"We are alone?" he asked, glancing at the door leading into another room.

"Absolutely. But prevention is better than cure," laughed the Count, jumping up with alacrity and going to the door. "Absolutely," he said again, as he closed the second door. Then he went to the big, leather-cushioned armchair by the table, and seating himself comfortably therein, began to play with the tassels of his *robe de chambre*, anxiously awaiting what was coming.

"I came," began the Governor, his air be-

coming more businesslike, "on account of your nephew."

"My nephew? You mean Gourowsky? What of him?" asked the Count, astonishment showing in his haughty features.

The Governor fumbled in his coat pocket for some papers, which he laid on the writing table.

"It is anything but pleasant."

The Count glanced at the bundle, then he said breathlessly: "You don't mean to say he is implicated in the Wasily Ostroff affair? You cannot mean——"

"I am afraid so. It is a case of *cherchez la femme*. He is altogether in the toils of the Jewess, Louboff Malkiel, sister of one of the ringleaders. Here are the papers setting forth his surveillance.

"He was in her company Tuesday and Wednesday. He was seen speaking to some of those suspected in St. Isaac's Thursday morning. He sent her this letter—a copy, of course—Thursday night."

With a hand shaking more or less from agitation, the Count took the letter and read as follows:

"Dearest Louboff Antonivna:

"What has happened? I waited for you

three hours at our place of rendezvous and am overcome with apprehension and fear. What prevented your coming? I also waited outside Rubinstein's door all the evening expecting you would go there, but to no avail; and now I sit here eating my heart. What is it? What am I to think? For heaven's sake, answer this. I do not make light of the difficulties besetting our path, but I can assure you every pulse of my heart beats in affection for you. I await your answer with impatience.

Yours,

"Boris."

"All this means—what?" Count d'Annenkoff raised an ashen face to the Governor.

They had been comrades in arms, and spent their school years together and were more like two brothers than friends.

"I fear, only too plainly, that Malkiel has succeeded in contaminating his mind with revolutionary ideas."

"And the fool! To write such a letter—such a letter to a Nihilist! Why, Siberia is written across it in letters of flame!"

"Were he not your nephew——"

"And these Malkiels—why are they not in chains?" demanded the Count hotly. "What have we got our fortresses for? *Ach!* The

accursed Jews! Why must our holy Russia be burdened with them. Aliens, traitors, breeders of discontent; why do they not go to their Jerusalem! Why stay in a country that loathes them!"

"For the best of all reasons: What would they do there? On whom would they fatten?"

"Why, I repeat, are the Malkiels not in chains?" the Count inquired angrily.

The Governor lit his cigarette nonchalantly.

"Haste is not always a wise handmaiden," he began sententiously. "Many more than the Malkiels are implicated in this affair and we want to round up the whole herd. Besides we are studying their methods. Then, too, we still lack documentary proof against Michel Malkiel—still need proof against those connected with him. Your nephew is a fool, and were he not your nephew, as I was going to say before, he would certainly be in chains in the Petro Pavlovsky fortress now. But this Malkiel is a very different fellow—a cunning, crafty plotter. Two of my men are in his house; they examine his papers daily, but he has all the natural wiliness of the Jew. He slips through our fingers in the moment

when we seem to have him most securely, and he can do this principally because he has such a clever tool in the person of his sister Louboff."

"And who is this Louboff? Young, of course?"

"Yes; more. Young, beautiful and a very clever pianist; a pupil of Rubinstein."

"Alexei Alexeiwitch, if this matter comes to the knowledge of anyone, I am ruined. My nephew—faugh! It is sickening, and it comes—it all comes—because of my sister and her philanthropy. Educating the children of the peasant and neglecting her own son. What business has Boris Alexanderowitch over in the miserable student, Jew-infested lodgings of the Wasily Ostroff? What business, I ask?"

The Governor puffed away at his cigarette, then, removing it slowly, he made a gesture with his hands.

"None whatever. The best thing you can do is to take him away from there as quickly as possible. Anything may happen any minute. Our men have Malkiel pretty well trapped. His surveillance has been complete, and the hatchet will fall when he least expects it. Get Boris Alexanderowitch away; send

him across the frontier for a time. Do whatever you think best, but do it quickly."

The Governor stood up.

"No, no," said the Count with more show of perturbation in his manner than the Governor ever remembered seeing before; "you must not go yet. Another glass of tea. And this thing: tell me some more about it. How long has it been going on? Since when have you been forced to have Boris Alexandero-witch shadowed?"

"Only within the last few days. Before that his conduct was exceptional. We watched him, of course; we watch all of them," said the Governor with a shrug. "But we never found anything—not even a note from a woman—and young men will be young men, you know. He seemed the student, pure and simple, and if all of them had been like him my sleep would have been easier. But you see, even the best of them fall. Youth is so hot headed and stupid. I was simply staggered when I got these papers last night."

"Well, I will act at once."

"Good, there are the papers; you know what to do. Destroy them if you see fit. Such things are best destroyed. I will give you as long as I can."

The Governor moved to the door, and Count d'Annenkoff saw him to the ante-chamber, where a footman cloaked his departing guest carefully.

"Au revoir, Alexei Alexeiwitch. A thousand thanks for your courtesy."

"Pas de quoi, mon ami. I regret having to wake you up at an hour so unearthly."

Count d'Annenkoff walked back to his study slowly, and having given orders not to be disturbed till his secretaries came at twelve, he sat down to a quick consideration of the whole matter.

"Could Alexei Alexeiwitch be trusted? Could anyone in Russia be trusted?" This was the first thought that presented itself, and it formed the basis of his reflections throughout. Nothing but the presence of the papers left behind by the Governor served to allay his fears.

That he was surrounded by enemies, polite of mien, suave of voice, copious in the wiles of flattery and strategy, all awaiting an opportunity to hurl him from his present high favor at Court, he knew. Just such a chance as this presenting itself in the escapade of his nephew Boris was exactly what they were watching for and would surely pounce on.

with avidious glee. Long years of diplomacy had trained the Count in distrust, and had also taught him the uselessness of a man who had fallen from grace to expect the smallest mercy.

The friendship, therefore, of Alexei Alexei-witch had not touched his gratitude; it had only alarmed him.

One thing above all: he must lay his plans carefully; and as to Boris, he certainly must not excite his suspicions or let him suspect that Government spies were in the secret of his plottings. This last, he told himself, would be hard to manage, but he felt sure at the same time his diplomacy was equal to the task.

Count d'Annenkoff wrote a letter to his sister. It was a peremptory command that she come at once to St. Petersburg and that she lodge in his house; one of the apartments of which he would place at her disposal. The letter also contained the information that Boris had a flirtation with a young Jewess, the Count strictly enjoining his sister to keep this piece of news to herself, and more especially its source.

This letter Count d'Annenkoff was far too astute to intrust to transmission by post. He

knew the workings of Russian officialdom too thoroughly. He rang for his servant and directed that one of his confidential *chasseurs* be sent for. When the latter arrived, he handed him the letter, telling him to take the first train to Gourowsky, to deliver the letter directly into the hands of the Countess, to wait till the lady was ready, return with her and act as her courier.

Next, Count d'Annenkoff dashed off hastily a note to Boris, asking him to call at his earliest convenience. Another *chasseur* left with this note, and then the Count rose, satisfied, having mapped out his whole plan of campaign.

By this time it was twelve o'clock. He saw his secretaries on several matters of State business, then he put himself into the hands of his valet to make his toilet for the day.

This was elaborate. After a bath in aromatic herbs, with several atmospheric changes, there was the masseur, who rubbed oils and liquids into his body for almost an hour; then the manicure took him in charge; next his barber, whose sole duty in the household was the shaving of his master, and lastly his valet commenced his dressing.

Dressed, Count d'Annenkoff gave several small orders, lastly one to his florist and confectioner for the forwarding of flowers and candy to one of the celebrated actresses of the French theatre.

His domestic duties being finished for the day, Count d'Annenkoff descended to his wife's salon to await the announcement of luncheon, and entertain any guest she might happen to have.

It was a matter of surprise to him to find her alone. His daughter Vera was lunching out, so he seized the occasion to confide to the Countess the plans for his sister's arrival. She gave but one ejaculation. "*Mon cher ami!*" she cried slowly, but it was expressive of keen displeasure. Then she sat silent, listening to his explanations, knowing her own displeasure was futile so far as he was concerned.

When Count d'Annenkoff gave an order in the household it was final. So far as social matters went he never interfered, never sought to restrain her liberty in any way. He had the utmost confidence in her good taste and in her good sense.

"It hardly befits our station," he went on in his bland, formal way, "to have Boris

Alexanderowitch in Wasily Ostroff. Several persons have commented on the matter, therefore I have made the arrangements I speak of. At the same time I do not care to take upon myself the responsibility of looking after him. Young men will be young men, you know, and it is best his mother look after him, as it is her duty she should. It will not put you out any way. I have selected her apartments and will attend to the getting of servants, carriages and all necessities."

"She will necessarily be much with us, and her *monde* is so stupid," murmured the Countess poutingly. "You will find all the philanthropic cranks in St. Petersburg dining at your table."

"Oh, no," said the Count quickly; "I shall provide against that. She will have her separate *menage* and can entertain whom she pleases."

The face of the Countess brightened. She had imagined an arrangement of a much more intimate order.

"Then you intend she remains here?"

"Yes, as long as Boris is a student." Then from sheer gratitude at her ready acquiescence—he had expected at least strongly voiced disapproval—he said confidentially:

“There is much disaffection among his classmates, and for my own sake I intend to keep him clear of all suspicion in that regard.”

“You are perfectly right, and as wise as usual, *mon ami*,” she said, with a flash of her still beautiful blue eyes.

Then luncheon being announced, they went to the dining-room together—a state of affairs that had not existed in a twelve-month.

CHAPTER X.

The note from Count d'Annenkoff reached Boris Alexanderowitch about three o'clock, and he tossed it aside impatiently. He was then in a state of mind bordering on frenzy. Michel had not been to his lodgings in the house, and all Boris' efforts to hear of Loub-off or see her were in vain. She had not replied to his note in any form, and he had spent the morning in St. Isaac's on the mere chance of finding her there.

Having eaten nothing since the day before, he had just arrived home, tired, hungry without wanting to eat, and dejected beyond comparison. The more he thought the matter out the greater became his confusion of mind.

After a while he glanced again at his uncle's note.

"I should like to have a talk with you as soon as possible. Call this evening before dinner or to-morrow before luncheon.

"Annenkoff."

Boris wrinkled his brows. What could his uncle have to talk to him about? All at once a horrible suspicion drove the color from

his face, and he stood up in agitation.

In a town like St. Petersburg, where espionage is complete, there are no secrets. What if his uncle knew of his affection for Louboff? Boris realized his power; realized, too, that in a case where Count d'Annenkoff's own family and prestige were concerned his uncle would use this power ruthlessly. What if Louboff had been taken away—sent to Siberia—to Schlusselfburg; murdered?

He clenched his hands in sudden agony and began to pace up and down his narrow room restlessly. So complete was the jangle of his nerves in that moment that a knock at the door made him cry out in startled alarm. It was only a servant who came with luncheon and the samovar.

The sight of the familiar and rosy, smiling-faced woman in her bright dress and red and white dotted kerchief, tied over her thick blond hair, relieved his feelings.

"Thank you, Natascha," he said in his normal tone, and he sat down, feeling the color come back to his face. "You haven't," he asked as the woman set the table, "seen anything of Michel Antonowitch?"

"No, *barin*; he has not slept here in three nights."

She went out, and he uncovered the viands before him.

“I must eat,” he told himself. “After all, why should there be any coincidence in this strange silence of Louboff’s and a letter from my uncle? I am simply weak-headed from loss of sleep and want of food. I will eat now,” he concluded, and, sitting down to the big plate of soup, he finished it. Soon he felt better, and such is the buoyancy and the need of youth that he began to enjoy his food and even to find it scanty. He cleaned everything from the dishes—bread, meat, vegetables—then he made himself several glasses of tea, and began to smoke, for the first time in twenty-four hours, with pleasure.

A dozen possible causes of Louboff’s silence presented themselves. She might be testing his affection; she might not be sure of her own mind; she might perhaps be ashamed. Boris himself reddened at the ardor of his wooing, at the meaning and passion he had put into his kisses.

He certainly had been effusive, and then she was an artist; she might at first resent his occupying her attention in any degree. A friendship between them was surely unwise.

So many family and artistic difficulties presented themselves.

“Yes, yes,” thought Boris; “it is all very awful. No two in all Russia could face greater obstacles than we: class hatred, prejudice, ambition, family pride, all are arrayed against us; but it is love, and that in itself says everything and is an excuse for all things. And love, if it be great enough, can break down any and all barriers. She may be testing me; she may be testing herself, perhaps, but there is no escape—no escape for either of us.

“One thing, however; I must not let myself go as I have in the last few days. God is good. Time unravels all tangles.”

He got up, stretched himself with a feeling of great satisfaction, and, dressing, went out. He reached his uncle’s house as the clock struck five.

That he was expected was evident, for he was shown at once to his uncle’s study, where he found the latter with a mass of legal papers before him to which he was affixing his seal and signature.

“Ah, Boris! Good-evening. I am glad to see you come so promptly. You got my letter, of course?”

“Yes, *mon oncle*.”

“Well, take a seat. I want to have a long talk with you, even if I must meanwhile go on with these tiresome documents. As you will soon know by experience, I hope, official life means much more than gold lace and emoluments. Make yourself comfortable; beside you are the cigars and cigarettes, and the liquer decanters as well.”

Boris sat down.

“Now,” began the Count, “I am aware of the bequest left you by your father; I am also aware that the Gourowsky revenues are not what they were when my sister married your father. But, as you know, my wealth has been steadily increasing, and I have but one daughter; so I have decided to make you an allowance.

“I have been greatly pleased with your independence and pluck, in finding lodgings in the Wasily Ostroff and living there. It was very noble of you, my boy, considering that you had the money to live otherwise, yet preferred to devote it to your dead father’s philanthropic schemes; but it is about time I came forward.

“Now don’t thank me, and do not flush up and tell me you are content and prefer inde-

pendence. Independence is a great thing, to be sure, but, my dear Boris, which of us is really independent? Not one of us, not even the Tsar himself. Now you are of my own blood—my heir, in fact, if anything, which God forbid,” cried the Count as he crossed himself piously, turning to the ikon before which a silver lamp was burning, “should happen to your cousin Vera—and my plan is this; I have already written to your mother; she is coming here.”

“Coming here!” gasped Boris.

“Yes; she will be here by next week. I am having an apartment fitted up in the house for her—for both of you—and on the first of each month my steward will hand you a cheque for a thousand roubles.”

Count d’Annenkoff smiled blandly as he looked at the amazed and silent Boris.

“You see,” he went on, signing the papers, and tossing them to one side uninterruptedly, “everything depends in St. Petersburg on the keeping up of appearances. You have your career before you and it is doubtless brilliant. Your father’s name alone will insure that, but it is only in youth real friendships are formed, and I want you to keep up with your own set, and this you can only do by having

a few roubles in your pocket to spend and by spending them.

“Women do not understand these things; I speak to you as man to man. Now, to-morrow I want you to go and choose your horses—you will stable them here, of course, with mine—and if you do not find a thousand roubles sufficient for spending money, why, you can always come to me and I will be your banker.”

Boris listened absently as one in a dream.

What was the matter with life suddenly? He found himself in love; here was his uncle offering him, even pressing on him, a small fortune, and his beloved mother was coming to St. Petersburg.

“But, *mon oncle*, how can I ever thank you! Such generosity—I do not deserve it. I hardly feel as if I dare accept it.”

“Yes,” laughed the Count’s bland, well-modulated voice, and to Boris it sounded far away and unreal. “But I mean you shall. It is for my benefit as well as yours. I cannot have a nephew over in Wasily Ostroff, so look on it as my affair entirely and that the service is altogether a benefit to me rather than to you.”

“But this goes beyond generosity.”

“Nonsense, my dear nephew; it is only duty. Now, go to your aunt, and, of course, you will remain to dinner. Alexei Alexei-witch and some others dine here.”

Boris stood up.

“Yes,” he said absent-mindedly. Then he caught his uncle’s firm white hand in a cordial grasp of gratitude.

“Well, run along, my boy; I am very busy,” the latter said apologetically, seeing that Boris still hesitated. Then tapping a bell, two secretaries came forward, carrying between them a well-filled basket of letters and public documents.

Boris saluted and went out. He made his way slowly to the salon, hardly knowing whether to be glad or sorry at his uncle’s generosity.

CHAPTER XI.

During dinner Boris could not prevent his attention continually wandering from the subjects discussed by those around him, and his neighbor, a well-known society woman, used to being admired and amused, was quite annoyed at finding his remarks so often at random. He was placed opposite the Governor of the city, and more than once he found that high official studying him intently.

At first Boris felt somewhat conscious and confused under the scrutiny, then it occurred to him that Alexei Alexeiwitch and his uncle were very great friends, so perhaps this bringing him to the house was a purport of further good fortune.

Count d'Annenkoff, he knew, never made a move in the game of life that was not thought out and reasoned over. The Governor had many snug berths at his disposal; he had the reputation also of liking young blood, so what more natural than that he would have in view some such post for his friend's nephew?

The more Boris pondered over this probability the surer he felt about it, and his con-

fusion increased under the searching glance of the stern blue eyes so often sent in his direction.

He excused himself as soon as dinner was over, on the plea of an engagement, and, taking an *iswostschik*, was driven to Rubinstein's. Here fate seemed against him. The ante-chamber was crowded with departing guests, and Matvè informed him that Rubinstein had left five minutes earlier for the Conservatory.

Boris went away from Troitsky Pereulok very much dejected and depressed. Rubinstein, he knew, if any one could, would of all others be the one able to give him news of Louboff; assure him as to her health and safety, at least. Not quite knowing what best to do, he walked slowly to the Nevsky, and had about made up his mind to call openly on Louboff—she had certainly given him a cordial invitation right before her brother—when the fear of causing her trouble in any way decided him to change his mind, and he hurried home in the hope of finding a note from her at his lodgings.

When Natascha opened the door for him he inquired again if Michel Antonowitch was in, but Natascha replied in the negative. Then

he went to his room, and was further disappointed by not finding any note from Louboff. As usual there was the big, fat letter, directed in the bold handwriting he knew so well—a letter from his mother—lying on the pink blotting pad which almost covered the whole of his small writing-table.

Something unfamiliar in the arrangement of his table made Boris wonder. His cigarette box had been tampered with and opened, and much of its contents extracted. Cigarette ash was strewn all over his papers, and some mathematical problems he had been working out—or, rather, trying to work out—that morning were scattered and disarranged.

Taking up his mother's letter, and opening it, he found, greatly to his dismay, that it had been previously opened and only recently closed, for the gum on the edges of the envelope was still moist and stuck to his fingers.

Boris sat up straight, startled completely out of his habitual composure. What did it mean? Thieves, or something worse? He drew his breath in several short gasps.

If his latter suspicion was correct, then he understood why his uncle should be so anxious to get him away from the students' quarter. Then that quick, keen thrill of fear that

shoots through every Russian breast—be its owner ever so brave or innocent—when it is a question of police surveillance, smote him badly.

“But I am a Gourowsky! They could never suspect *me*,” he thought, his face pale with apprehension. Then he looked at the envelope again, and, taking out the letter, tried to read it with attention, but found that the words and their meaning failed to impress themselves on his brain in any intelligible sequence.

Then again he looked through it to find any trace of his mother’s intention of leaving for St. Petersburg, but found instead every indication that she would be busy for months with her work at Gourowsky.

“I must get out of here as quickly as possible,” he thought; “that is certain. Whatever it is, thieves or police surveillance—the one is as bad as the other.” He sat down to plan out his packing. “I will commence first with these,” he told himself as he opened the drawer of his writing-table, where a mass of papers were thrown.

He began to sort them, and those that were to be destroyed he caught up and was about to burn in the stove when a note that had

fallen on the floor attracted his attention, and before stooping for it he placed the bulky bundle on the table and reseated himself.

He read the note, then glancing at the letters to be destroyed, said lazily:

“Natascha can do that to-morrow. If I open that stove I may not be able to close it again, and besides if I am under police surveillance, it is as well not to leave the charred remains of paper about; it looks too much as if I had something to burn.”

A sound below caught his ear. It was the opening of the outside door. Then Boris could hear someone come upstairs and enter Michel's room. It was difficult for Boris to overcome a desire to go down on some trivial excuse and see him, so as to find out about Louboff. It would be very natural he should inquire about her—no more than politeness on his part—but then, he reasoned, he had never gone of his own accord to Michel's rooms, and if there was any unpleasantness about Louboff having gone with him to Rubinstein's and there might be—Jews were just as anxious to prevent the friendship of their people with Christians as Christians with Jews—why, it would only make matters still more disagreeable for her.

Then Boris remembered that Michel and he had a class to attend at eleven, so he decided to take no chances but wait till then. It was only a few hours more, he told himself consolingly, for, looking up at the clock, he saw it was almost two. Then he went to bed.

For what seemed to him a long while he lay awake listening to the merry jingle of the sleigh bells outside, the shouts and laughter of roisterers on their way homeward; then, as in a dream, Boris, half asleep, heard more sleigh bells, till finally it seemed to him as if the whole street were alive with their music.

There must be hundreds, he told himself, waking up. Yes, and they seemed to be stopping right outside the house. He could hear carriage wheels crunching, too, over the hardened snow; then he heard orders given and knew them to be military orders.

He suddenly sprang to a sitting position in his bed. There was a sharp, stifled scream in the room beneath him—Michel's room—a scuffle, and several hoarse cries of rage.

Boris jumped out of bed. The noise in the street grew louder each moment, and then the ominous click of sabres and spurred boots sounded outside on the landing.

“Water! water! A bucket of water at once!” roared an excited voice.

Could it be fire? The house was old and built of wood; a very tinder box for flame.

He rushed to the door, unlocked it, but stopped short when he saw the landing. Soldiers were everywhere about.

“What do you want, young man? Get back to your room,” said a stern voice at his elbow, and a gloved hand grasped him rudely by the arm and thrust him back.

Boris ran at once to the window. The house was built back in a garden and gave him a good view of the sidewalks.

Soldiers were posted all about; groups of men were passing and repassing constantly. Then Boris saw a slight figure, half led, half pushed by two stalwart policemen down the garden path and up to a waiting carriage.

It was Michel Malkiel.

A pang of horror and even of pity smote Boris, much as he disliked his classmate, as he saw the unfortunate youth, bent and huddled with fear and terror, uttering piteous cries of despair, roughly thrust within the vehicle. Then the carriage drove off, and the next instant Boris turned round to find his privacy invaded by several uniformed men.

“Your name?”

Boris drew himself up haughtily.

“I am Count Gourowsky, Boris Alexanderowitch,” he said calmly.

“Your passport?”

“In the drawer of my writing table.”

“Everything in this room belongs to you?”

“Everything but the furniture.”

“Officer, take all the papers.”

In a portfolio Boris saw all the papers he had intended to burn thrown carelessly. Then the men began a systematic search of his room, tapping the walls and the floors for places of concealment; searching his clothes and trunks, and even opening the stove to look for any traces of charred paper. Without a word, the search over, the men left, and Boris, wrapping his dressing gown closer about himself and covering this with his fur cloak, sat down to think out what it all meant.

Ten minutes later the chief officer entered unannounced. Boris saw he was a general.

“Have you any statement to make—any confession—Boris Alexanderowitch?”

“*I!*” The inflexion of scorn in the single vowel betokened all the young man’s amazement and anger.

“Yes,” replied his interrogator calmly.

“You; whom else? Am I asking questions of your stove or of your writing table?”

“Most assuredly I have no confession to make, and any further questioning of that sort will be resented by me,” cried Boris hotly. “I shall see my uncle, Count d’Annenkoff, about this in the morning.”

The officer shrugged his shoulders, and then for one awful moment Boris felt his heart die within him. Was he not altogether in this man’s power? Was it wise, he argued, to anger so potent an advocate or witness for good or evil, as this general?

Yes, it might even mean Siberia for him. “Show me your company and I will decide what you are” is the axiom Russian police have implicit faith in, and here he had been seen in Michel Malkiel’s company; he had been in his rooms; visited his father’s house.

“Then you have nothing to say?”

Boris could feel his heart beating violently, but curbed his anger.

“No, your Excellency; I have nothing whatever to say.”

“So much the better,” said the general lightly. Then he said affably (he, on his side, was anxious not to incur the enmity of a Min-

ister so great and powerful as Count d'Annenkoff): "*Spakoinee notch*."

"*Spakoinee notch*," echoed Boris, unconscious of the irony in the good wish for a peaceful night, as he bowed and returned the military salute.

After that, Boris heard doors shutting below, the heavy tread of booted and spurred heels, of men evidently going the rounds from room to room. After an hour or so all was still, the noise of the sleigh bells sounded again and then passed away, leaving the street in the absolute stillness of early morning.

Boris sat on, too agitated and miserable even to light a cigarette. How was it possible that he should not have suspected it? Michel Malkiel a Nihilist, and Louboff? What was she? A fugitive, perhaps, or worse still—a prisoner.

How else could her silence be construed? In utter wretchedness and misery, with the memory of her lovely face haunting him, Boris laid his head down on his outspread elbows, and sitting the rest of the night before the writing table, dozed from time to time, only to waken again with a start of terror.

Earlier than usual Natascha was about.

He could hear her below working. Then slowly she mounted the stairs, and he knew she was bringing him his samovar, for Boris was the first to be served, being the earliest worker. When she opened the door her round fat face showed white and agitated.

"Ah, *barin*," she whispered.

"Yes, yes, Natascha," he said soothingly.

"Michel Antonowitch has gone."

"I know, Natascha."

"And they took a bomb out of his room. Oh, the poor misguided young gentleman! Only last night he gave me a rouble; see, I have it yet. I, myself, saw the bomb," she continued in an awed whisper. "I brought the pail of water and watched them put it in it."

"I know; I know," assented Boris.

"Ah, *barin*, you have not slept at all?"

"Very little."

"Nor I; nor I. It is a sad world, *barin*. Drink your tea, my pigeon; you look white and weary."

"Weary, weary; that is just it," he thought, as he tried to smile at the sympathetic peasant woman, so young yet so motherly, like all her class. "Yes, weary enough to die."

Then he drank his tea, and roused himself. "I must go to my uncle's house without delay," he mused, and began packing his books and clothes in a hurry.

An hour later a knock at the door caused him to jump.

A man servant was outside when he opened it and handed him a letter.

The quick blood rushed to his face when, on opening it, he found it signed "Louboff."

"Come to Rubinstein's to-night at eight. He will be out at a concert, but wait for me till I come.

"Always yours,

"LOUBOFF."

"At last," cried Boris aloud.

He read the letter over and over again. Then he saw the man watching him, evidently waiting for a reply.

"The answer is yes, and that I am delighted to get this note," said Boris, delving in his pocket for a fee, as his voice rang out clear, proud and strong for the first time in three days.

CHAPTER XII.

The hardest task Boris had ever lived up to was his class work the morning following Michel Malkiel's arrest. The mathematical problem swam before his eyes, and every time his glance fell on Malkiel's empty place a feeling of horror drove all else from his mind as he thought of what Louboff's anguish must be.

Not a word was said by anyone in the class as to Michel's arrest, but the moment the lecture was over the students slunk away one by one, careful to avoid conversation; distrust and aloofness in the manner of each.

Boris hurried to the house of his uncle, and after waiting an hour in the ante-chamber, was informed that the latter could only see him for a few moments.

"Well," said the Count genially, after his usual polite greeting. "What is it, my nephew?"

Boris hesitated.

"Speak," cried his uncle testily.

"We are not alone, *mon oncle*," said Boris in a low tone.

With a wave of his hand the Count dismissed his secretaries and then in a minute or two Boris related the events of the night before and his indignation at being so uncere- moniously searched and questioned.

“What a pretty dissembler we have here,” thought the Count with gratification. “Even knowing the facts as I do he almost convinces me.”

Then he commenced in his easy, quiet way to tell what he knew. His voice growing more stern as he proceeded. Boris could feel the blood recede from his heart as he listened. After all, how wise were the kindly warnings of his mother!

“Boris,” he heard the Count say. “You were with Louboff Malkiel on such and such a day; you wrote her this note”—and then, relying on a marvelous memory, the Count gave him verbatim the contents of his letter to Louboff—“and on Thursday morning you were speaking to well-known revolutionists in St. Isaac’s Cathedral. How do you account for that? Your story is plausible, but——

“Malkiel is in irons, and you—you are here before me now rather than with him because you are my nephew and I commanded it.

“Now, let this be a lesson to you forever.

No matter what your sympathies may be, understand that you cannot cope with his Imperial Majesty's government. We know everything. Your private lives are open books to us, and if occasionally Nihilism does take a life, how many lives, may I ask," cried the Count, pausing impressively, "pay the price in all our prisons from St. Petersburg to Siberia?"

Boris at last summoned up courage enough to allay his agitation, and in a voice trembling with reproach, he said spiritedly:

"*Mon oncle*, you do not think that I, Boris Gourowsky, have been one of these revolutionists, or been in with them—that I am a traitor to my Tsar and country?"

Then, seeing that Count d'Annenkoff continued staring at him, he went on, and without a shadow of prevarication told the whole truth of his love affair in all its naked simplicity; how he met Louboff for the first time in her brother's room by mere chance; how it had been a case of love at first sight. Then he told of his visit to the Corps des Mines; of her playing for him that evening; of taking her to St. Isaac's; of the dinner at Rubinstein's and the drive home; how he had an appointment with her the morning after at

St. Isaac's, and how he had asked some men there if they had seen her.

The Count listened attentively, and concluded that Boris was speaking the truth.

"Ah! So instead of Nihilism I come on *la grande passion*," he laughed. "Your first love affair?" he questioned sneeringly, as he glanced up at the handsome youth standing in his agitation and with the confusion of relating so openly his heart's secrets.

"Yes, *mon oncle*," replied Boris.

"Well, my nephew, it is only another proof of how careful one must be in the choice of one's associates. As to this love affair, that is ridiculous; you will realize only how ridiculous when you meet your next divinity."

Boris shook his head and smiled unbelievably.

"Why, my boy, how many such affairs do you think you will have in your life? Hundreds. I am surprised only that you have commenced so late. At your age I knew as much practically as I do now. I have gone through the routine thoroughly, and I know. The first seems the whole universe, the second one begins to find out, and from that on it is only a matter of degree. One masters these emotions with each succeeding attack, and

you only discover what a farce it is when the years change your sentiments and you find that which you once loved madly, once could sacrifice all but life for, grown old and horrible and agonizingly unsympathetic. Yes, you will have to shake this little Jewess from your affections. She is undoubtedly a Nihilist, a tool of her brother; we have every proof of that, and being a good subject of his Majesty, I know you will.

“But we have been talking half an hour. I am glad to have your statement. I will see that you are protected from all danger. Send on your things here at once; your apartment is in readiness for you.”

Boris, feeling himself dismissed, stumbled out like one in a trance.

“This is the worst yet,” he told himself, as he hurried back to his lodgings. “Louboff a Nihilist!”

For a long while he could neither think nor reason. He kept repeating the words: “Louboff a Nihilist” over and over again to himself aloud; yet, try as he would, he could neither put her from his thoughts nor hate her.

The confusion of his ideas tortured him. His few belongings packed, he threw himself

exhausted on his bed, half maddened by the knowledge that eventually, unless some miracle intervened, it would mean their parting.

How the day ever passed he knew not, till at eight o'clock he found himself in Rubinstein's dimly lit salon watching for her coming with a mingled agony and joy that seemed to gnaw at the very vitals of his being.

"It must be a parting forever," said his reason to him. "Between Louboff and myself, come what will, there can be no parting," cried his heart.

At last there was a ring at the doorbell. He heard her greet Matvè as the latter removed her cloak; then she came in and stood in the center of the floor, looking at him.

Boris waited till the footsteps of Matvè had passed through the dining-room and down the long passage to the kitchen, then he came forward.

"Louboff." There was a wail of reproach and suffering in the deep, mellow tones of his voice.

With a gesture of passion that unnerved him completely, she put her two hands out to him.

"I got your letter," she began, "and——"

"You did not answer it."

"Because I could not. I will explain everything. I will tell you later." Then she drew nearer to him. "Oh, Boris, Boris, my friend," she cried in anguish, "do not desert me now."

His arms were about her on the moment.

"Not now nor ever, sweetheart!" he cried, his arms tightening as he kissed her in a paroxysm of delight upon finding that his heart had gained the ascendancy rather than his head. Then looking down into her startled eyes, he said softly. "Louboff, I love thee—love thee better than heaven or my soul."

The familiar "thee" made her head swim with delirious joy; the passionate protest of the whole sentence from him, Boris the Orthodox, first elated and then appalled her.

"Boris, Boris, this, can it be——"

"Can it be? Sweetheart, I speak in earnest, in deadly earnest. I do not know how we are to arrange it, but you can if you will; you must marry me."

"I? A Jewess!"

He caught her hand between his hands. "Do not say that! Do not say that! Jewess, Nihilist, anything—forget all I have said; only listen and believe me when I tell you that

I love you, and that I care not what happens. You can make hell itself my paradise."

"Boris, I am no Nihilist, I swear it," she added earnestly. "I—— Ah, let me tell you."

She led him to a divan, and, sitting side by side, his arm about her, she told him in gasps, with tears, brokenly, her story from the moment she had left him the night he had brought her home and Michel had almost struck her for not finding out the particulars of d'Annenkoff's departure, and then had kept her locked in her room till his arrest had freed her.

"But, Louboff, you would not have wormed the secret from me, would you?" he asked pleadingly.

"My beloved, you yourself are the best witness. Did I try?"

"No, no, no!" he cried gratefully.

They began to talk of Michel's arrest and after a while she stood up in her agitation and laid her hands on his shoulder.

"It is folly," she said bitterly; "pure folly. The idea of any future for us together is absolutely impossible. Probably they will exile me and my father. My father is preparing for it; he expects it; he is waiting for it. I

know, myself, something will happen; and you—— Ah, Boris! Your career is here, your home is here, your mother is here, and I——” She looked up at him yearningly and then burst into tears.

“Louboff, you will never leave me,” he cried hopefully. “You will stay as my wife. You must come to my uncle; you must tell what you know.”

“No, no, no!” she almost screamed, her eyes dilated with horror. “Not for ten thousand lives—not if Siberia faced me to-night! Buy my happiness through the misery of another!”

“Then I alone must manage things,” he cried sturdily, “and believe me, I can, if only I know that you trust me and that you renounce Nihilism forever.”

“I never was a Nihilist,” she said quickly; “never really at heart. I know the wrongs of Russia to my race, and I ought to be—perhaps even,” she went on meditatively, “I was, till the day I—I met you.”

Her answer enchanted him; his face flushed with pleasure.

“Louboff, my beloved, nothing—nothing shall part us,” he murmured rapturously. “If necessary we shall see the Tsar himself,

and you—you will come,” he added, laying particular stress on the “will” as he smiled tenderly down at her, “to my uncle and tell him the truth—just tell him why Michel locked you up. You are no Nihilist, my beloved, and I will not have it that this dreadful suspicion overshadow you.”

“What would he think to see us come in together?” she asked smiling, the tears glistening on her long lashes.

“Think, nothing. He knows I love you. I told him all.”

“All.” Her voice was low and penetrated through and through with horror. “You told him all? My God, Boris!” she cried despairingly. “Then I am lost—I am trapped.”

“Hush, hush, sweetheart,” he broke in soothingly. “You are unnerved.”

“Oh, Boris, you will see! You will see! This means Siberia for me.”

The prophetic ring in her voice alarmed him, and the sudden terror that had attacked her communicated itself to him.

They sat looking at each other blankly, then Boris stood up, his face set and white.

Along the passage from the kitchen they could hear the tread of spurred boots, the

voices of men, and Matvè's shrill outcries of distress.

His grasp tightened on her hands. Then the curtains leading to the salon were rudely parted, and an officer with two policemen entered and saluted them, the dry, hard tones of his voice falling like a knell on their ears as he said peremptorily:

“Louboff Antonivna Malkiel, you are my prisoner.”

CHAPTER XIII.

As the two policemen started forward to take their prisoner, Boris, with an oath, jumped before Louboff.

“Swine,” he shouted in the Russian of the people, “lay your hands on this lady, and I——”

“Boris!”

It was Louboff who spoke, her voice cold in its sternness.

The mere touch of her hand on his arm seemed to recall him to his senses and to the need of caution.

“You will serve me best by acquiescing in this thing,” she whispered. “I need the aid of all my friends now.”

Then suddenly she broke down and the terrible emotion of the moment convulsed her.

Throwing her arms about his neck, she clung to him and cried brokenly:

“Boris, Boris, my betrothed, no matter what happens, remember that I love you; that your love has been the supreme happiness of my life, and that I loved you the moment my eyes first met yours.”

As the men again came forward, she kissed him on the mouth, and, turning swiftly, said with a sob, nerve-racking in its despair:

“I am ready.”

Like one turned to stone, Boris stood in the ante-chamber, looking on, while Matvè, his eyes swimming with tears, cloaked Louboff and took her incoherent message for Anton Gregoriewitch.

Going down the stairs, she turned back once more and gave Boris an appealing glance, then the stalwart forms of the two policemen hid her from view. Matvè led Boris back to the salon, and he sank into a chair, a sudden paralysis seeming to come over all his senses.

Ten minutes later Anton Gregoriewitch burst into the ante-chamber in his usual impetuous fashion, halting dumbfounded at the attitude of the young man and tears of Matvè. He tossed back his hair and blinked his eyes.

“What is the matter?” he thundered.

“Oh, your Excellency, your Excellency—” began Matvè. “Louboff — Louboff — has — been — arrested,” gasped Boris, his voice strained and husky.

“Arrested!”

Rubinstein stood like a lion at bay. Louboff, on whom he counted to do so much

for the prestige of Russian art! Arrested!

“Arrested?” he repeated again, as he looked from one to the other sternly. Then he began to pace the room. Finally he came over to Boris.

“Tell me things,” he commanded. “Explain. By heaven, they shall not arrest her—not while Anton Rubinstein lives! She is a genius, a marvel; no woman pianist of to-day can touch her. What has she done? Is it because her brother——” He broke off.

Rapidly, eagerly, Boris told the story as he knew it, and, listening, Rubinstein’s face underwent many changes; then he drew a long breath.

“So,” he said, dropping, as he always did when excited, into German.

He paused for a moment, then clapping his hands, he said to Matvè, who obeyed the signal at once:

“Find me a good horse and an intelligent *iswostschik*. I give you two minutes.”

Boris came up to him.

“What can I do?” he asked.

“Nothing; nothing,” cried Rubinstein. “Stay here. Do whatever the devil you please. You are the cause of all this—your uncle, at least.”

Then, seeing the blank dismay in the young man's face, Rubinstein put his hand on his shoulder and said more kindly:

"Come along, if you like."

They got into their cloaks without help and descended the staircase rapidly. Matvè, out of breath from running, stood uncovered in the bitter cold, waiting to tuck them in.

"God guide you," he said piously, as they started on their way, and Boris, removing his cap, made the sign of the cross and said "Amen" fervently.

Rubinstein, listening, smiled sarcastically; then he directed the *iswostschik* to drive to the palace of the Grand Duke Sergius.

"I go there," said Rubinstein to Boris, as he tightened his fur collar closer about his chin, "because it is the nearest."

In every Imperial palace of the city Rubinstein was known to some of the *entourage*. Some of them were friends; some of them were pupils, some old acquaintances, dating from the days of the Grand Duchess Hélène, when Rubinstein himself held a post at Court; but all were devoted.

Where others would have found tedious formalities in being admitted, to Rubinstein all palace doors were ajar, and on reaching the

Sergius residence it only took a moment till they were conducted to the salon of chief lady-in-waiting to the Grand Duchess.

The former came in, effusive in her greeting, but as she listened to Rubinstein's mission her face became grave.

"The Grand Duke is now in his study," she said at length, "and it would be impossible for me to bring him your message, much as I would like to; but I will see some of the gentlemen in waiting and find out if they can do anything."

After a long delay, during which Boris and Anton Gregoriewitch exchanged perturbed glances, an important personage, the military governor of the household, gold lace and orders decorating his uniform of guardsman, came toward the two. It was his first meeting with Rubinstein, of a personal nature, and he seemed greatly elated over it.

After a few minutes' conversation he, too, looked perturbed; then he said gravely:

"We never disturb his Imperial Highness. Now, if she, the Grand Duchess, would do, she is much more accessible and just as apt to be successful."

Rubinstein frowned.

"No, no," he said abruptly; "this is a mat-

ter that presses. With her Imperial Highness, it might take a week—some days, at any rate—whereas the Grand Duke Sergius is the Tsar's brother. He alone will do."

The Prince bowed and shrugged his shoulders. Then he said after a pause, during which Rubinstein outlined his mission.

"Well, I will see what I can do. You have given me so much pleasure in my life, Anton Gregoriewitch; I am indeed happy to serve you in any way in my power; although," he added warningly, "if I know anything of the Grand Duke—and I have been in his service fifteen years—he is about the last person to be approached on such a mission."

He went away smiling, apologizing in advance for any delay that might occur. When he finally returned, his manner was gloomy.

"Just as I told you," he said with a shrug. "This is what his Imperial Highness has to say."

Rubinstein took the card and read aloud hastily:

"A thousand regrets that I cannot grant your request. Such people should be punished."

SERGIUS."

For a moment Anton Gregoriewitch looked about him frowning, then he tore the card into

fragments and threw them down on the carpet, before the horrified eyes of the two royal *serviteurs*.

"I thank you very much," he concluded, bowing, then he shook hands with them and went out, followed by Boris.

For a while Rubinstein stood on the steps of the palace, glancing impatiently toward the Anitchkoff palace, the residence of the Tsar. Finally he said aloud:

"No, no; better try the Grand Duke Constantine. He is an old friend."

Two obsequious lackeys of enormous size ran ahead as Rubinstein began to descend the steps, and held open the fur covering of the sleigh, assisting him most politely.

"Your Excellency wishes to go where?"

"To the palace of the Grand Duke Constantine."

There was a crunch of snow, and the feet of the horses scattered it like powder in their faces. They were once more off.

The lackeys of the Grand Duke Constantine all knew Rubinstein, for he was a frequent visitor at this palace, and he was admitted without delay to the small salon, where the Grand Duke, with some officers, were playing cards.

The Grand Duke greeted Rubinstein with great cordiality, but as soon as Anton Gregoriewitch made known his errand he turned to him with the patient reproach of manner one would bestow on a petulant child.

“Ah, my dear friend,” he said gravely, “what you ask is utterly impossible. To disturb the Tsar now, I could not dream of it; to-morrow perhaps, although,” he added sotto voce, “I hardly think even then—I dare. My sympathies are reported as ultra-revolutionary at Court, and it behooves me therefore in these troublous times to be careful. One, you know, has not only the Tsar to face; there is also,” he added, bending over till his mouth almost touched Rubinstein’s ear, “Pobiedonostseff,” and the Grand Duke ended with a shrug of superb disdain.

Rubinstein bit his lip a moment, then he said almost haughtily, so great was his disappointment and surprise:

“Well, your Imperial Highness knows best. A thousand pardons for disturbing you.”

“Anton Gregoriewitch,” cried the Grand Duke, jumping up, “you never could disturb me; your visits are always an honor; you are a big, whole-souled artist, and if I were Tsar——”

Rubinstein's handclasp was cordial, and the momentary anger in his face died away.

Ten minutes later Boris and Anton Gregoriewitch were entering the courtyard of the Anitchkoff palace, Rubinstein's face black in its pessimism and gloom.

"The Lord Chamberlain?"

"The Lord Chamberlain is not at home."

"Who is at home?" Rubinstein's voice was a roar.

"Why, why," stammered the man, "eh? Every one."

"Well, tell 'every one,' " cried Rubinstein, his face red with anger, "I want to see him."

A few minutes later an officer in a general's uniform entered the room, and with a cry of relief Rubinstein caught him by the two hands and embraced him.

"General Killieff!"

"Anton Gregoriewitch!"

"You are just the man I want, General. I must see the Tsar at once, on an affair of great importance."

A mellow laugh rang out.

"You are joking, master."

"No, I am in earnest; in deadly earnest."

"But it is near midnight."

Rubinstein had taken out his card and had

scratched on it in his clear handwriting:

“Anton Rubinstein most humbly craves an audience of his Imperial Majesty.”

General Killieff took the card, read it, then laughed again, his florid, handsome, Slavonic features beaming.

“You want me to have this presented?” he asked incredulously.

“I do.”

“Well, Anton Gregoriewitch, I do not know how I am to do it—if I can do it—but one must humor you.” Calling an aide-de-camp as he finished, he handed the latter the card and ordered it delivered.

Ten minutes passed slowly; Rubinstein was visibly nervous, and the conversation was desultory and uninteresting.

Then a pompous footman entered the room and said loudly:

“His Imperial Majesty, Alexander Alexanderowitch, will receive General Anton Rubinstein.”

Killieff looked astounded, Boris jumped to his feet in his excitement, and Rubinstein’s face flushed. Preceded by the lackey with his gold stick, the trio hurried along up and down staircases, through corridors, salons, and ante-chambers, till they reached what

seemed the farthest end of the palace, the corridors of which were thronged with pages, officers in order-decorated uniforms, and Tartar sentries.

They entered an immense salon, and here the guide beckoned Rubinstein alone, Boris and General Killieff halting on the threshold.

"His Excellency, Anton Gregoriewitch Rubinstein," announced the pompous lackey loudly.

"Anton Gregoriewitch Rubinstein, Sire," said a general, and Rubinstein went forward into the presence of the Tsar of all the Russias.

The light was subdued. Against a background of silver and Nile green, Boris caught sight of a charming interior. Flowers were everywhere; great pots of growing roses and azaleas. The Tsaritzza sat reading some letters. She nodded pleasantly to the Russian composer, and the Tsar, Alexander III., a man of enormous proportions, wearing the uniform of the Preobragensky regiment, turned slowly in the swivel chair before his writing table of ebony.

"Oh," he said graciously, as Rubinstein bowed low. "What is it that presses now, Anton Gregoriewitch? A new conservatory?"

A permanent orchestra? A new theatre?"

"Sire, the life of an artist."

"Indeed?" Into the Tsar's florid face there crept caution, and his blue eyes traveled up and down the well-known features of the great composer.

"Be seated and tell me what I can do."

When occasion required, Rubinstein had a simple eloquence which could always command the attention of his hearer. This, with all the force of his well-known personal magnetism, seldom left him in any lurch for long. As he began his story the Tsaritzza dropped her letters and looked up to listen. The Tsar kept his hand on the open page of the book he had been reading, and his slow, penetrating glance wandered frequently to where a doll lay on a sofa, covered with a silken shawl: the plaything of one of his younger children. Once or twice he stroked his thick red beard thoughtfully, but he heard Rubinstein through.

In his story Rubinstein had softened particulars, dwelling on Louboff's youth and her immense talents. "Sire," he said, "I pledge myself for her future behavior. I——"

This seemed to amuse the Tsar.

“What would you do?” asked his Majesty smiling. “Use the rod?”

Rubinstein gave a sigh of great relief.

“No, no, Sire; the exhortations of good, every-day common sense and the commands of a master.”

The Tsar looked over at his wife for inspiration, and caught a sympathetic glance.

“Well,” he began in his slow, precise way, “I never meddle in such affairs—not, at least, without consulting some of my people.” Then turning to an aide-de-camp, he said quietly: “Telephone for his Excellency, Count d’Annenkoff, to come here without delay.”

Rubinstein’s heart sank, and his expressive features lost their look of recent hopefulness. He pursed up his lips and knew that then or never it was his task to use all his powers of persuasion. He looked over at the Tsaritzza; then in lower tones he commenced the recital of the love affair between Boris and Louboff. All the world loves a lover, even a Tsar, and Rubinstein noted that both the royal personages listened with renewed interest.

“Appearances are against my pupil,” finished Rubinstein earnestly, after ten minutes’ rapid conversation, “and Count d’Annenkoff will doubtless raise many objections,

but, Sire, you are beyond all prejudice, and I ask your Majesty to grant this favor in the name of Russian art."

The Tsar smiled.

"Your story interests me," he replied. "The young girl, because of her artistic nature, is doubtless impressionable and easily led; but you have spoken so much and so eloquently of music, you make me long to hear some. It will be a treat for the Tsaritzza and myself."

Rubinstein rose at once, his face beaming. He was in the humor; more, he was determined to play as he had never played before. He opened the pianoforte himself, sat down, and let his hands wander over the keys while waiting until it was time to begin.

A moment later and the ante-chamber was crowded: pages, lackeys, ladies and gentlemen in waiting moved noiselessly nearer to the door of the Tsar's salon, and then one could hear the clocks ticking, so tense was the silence as Rubinstein commenced the G-major Nocturne of Chopin.

The Tsar kept time with his fingers on the writing table before which he was seated; the Tsaritzza, her head leaning on her hand, sat spellbound, and Rubinstein played with all

the magical sway at his command. Under his fingers the Nocturne was a beautiful love lyric, and as he played it brought to the hearts and minds of his audience a sense of awe, of pathos, of that mysterious law which guides and governs the human heart, of that power which has made and wrecked empires. That power before which all laws and human reckoning are powerless.

As he finished with the two last chords, exquisitely pianissimo, yet heard in the farthest corner of the outer salon, the Tsar sighed, then he smiled.

“Ah, how beautiful. What a gift is yours, Anton Gregoriewitch!”

“More, more. Do not stop!” cried the Tsaritzza, her great black eyes flashing, and Rubinstein, nothing loath, commenced the C-minor Nocturne.

He was still playing when he caught sight of Count d’Annenkoff’s perturbed countenance in the doorway, and a few seconds later, when he had finished, the latter entered and was announced in the silence which ensued.

“Ah, Count d’Annenkoff.”

The Tsar’s face was touched with deep emotion: He seemed to have difficulty in

shaking off the thrall of the master's music. He passed his hand across his face, and before Rubinstein had time to reach his seat, he said to the Count:

“Annenkoff, Anton Gregoriewitch has come to plead for the liberty of an artist, Louboff Malkiel, his pupil. I——”

He paused, looked at the hands of the crystal timepiece on the table before him, which had passed the hour of midnight, then regarding the Count fixedly, he said, decisively:

“I have granted his request. Your Excellency will see that this is attended to at once.”

The Count gave one quick and venomous glance toward Rubinstein; the latter glared back, then the Count said suavely with the intuition of your true courtiers:

“Sire, your command will receive my instant attention. The young woman is now undergoing a cross-examination at my house. I would humbly ask that this proceed, and,” he added sarcastically, “that Anton Gregoriewitch attend.”

The Tsar put up his two hands. “A very reasonable request,” he said after regarding the two men a moment. “When you have finished with the young woman, deliver her

into the care of his Excellency, who has pledged himself for her future good behavior."

Rubinstein dropped on his knees as he took the hand the Tsar offered, and kissing it, said gratefully:

"Sire, my humble thanks and most heartfelt gratitude are yours."

"Rise, your Excellency," said the Tsar, with his slow kindly smile. "You are Tsar of a greater Empire than mine. It has given me great pleasure to grant your request. The Tsaritza and I thank you for the treat you have given us in your beautiful music."

Ten minutes later Boris and Rubinstein were once more in the outside freezing atmosphere, joy and delight in the hearts of each.

"To the Annenkoff palace," said the latter gruffly, and side by side the two sleighs—that of the Minister of the Interior, with its prancing trio of thoroughbreds, silver harness, and priceless robes of fur, and the humbler one of Anton Rubinstein—pulled out of the courtyard and hurried down the Nevsky.

CHAPTER XIV.

"We have outwitted the greatest diplomat of the day," said Rubinstein with a chuckle, as he nudged his companion roughly.

"But do you think you dare ever enter his presence again?" asked Boris, with an ominous shake of his head.

"I do not care. I snap my fingers at all their scheming and intrigues. Of course, d'Annenkoff is not the man to forget this. I know he will cross my path in many things, make it his business to do so—especially relating to the conservatory—all of them know my tendon Achilles. But you, how can you crow? You are his nephew. I would not like to be in your shoes, Boris Alexanderowitch; no, not for a hundred thousand roubles!" and out on the stillness of the frosty night air Rubinstein's laugh rang heartily and loudly.

"As long as she is safe," said Boris, intense satisfaction in his tones, "I do not care; I am satisfied. What happens to me is no matter."

"*So!*" The expression of Rubinstein's face changed instantly from gleeful banter to

surprised alarm. He gave his companion a curious glance and said quickly :

“This, then, is a real love affair?”

“Nothing more real,” Boris said, smiling.

“Your intentions are honorable?”

“Honorable! Great heavens, Anton Gregoriewitch, I would give my life’s blood for Louboff Antonivna.”

“By that,” Rubinstein went on in a dry tone, “you mean you would love and cherish her, protect her, marry her, in short?”

“The first moment possible.”

“Indeed!” The snarl that accompanied the exclamation was malignant in the extreme, then a sudden passion began to convulse the features of the great composer.

“And it is for this you think that I, Anton Rubinstein, have deigned to beg favors from these people—for this you think I have made an enemy of Annenkoff—for this I have played the lackey to Tsar and Grand Dukes, to courtiers and Court fools—to see Louboff Malkiel your wife!”

The withering scorn of Anton Gregoriewitch’s tones struck Boris dumb.

“Anton Gregoriewitch!” he gasped.

“And you think,” went on the infuriated composer, “I have spent days and weeks and

years forming this talent—and it is a talent, the greatest I have found in Russia—to see it wasted in the salons of Petersburg, frittered as a pastime to tickle the ears of a stupid aristocracy. You think Louboff Malkiel will gain by becoming Countess Gourowsky?”

“Anton Gregoriewitch, we love each other,” began Boris pleadingly.

“Love! Bah, Boris Alexanderowitch, love, love? I do not speak against it. Love her, take her for your sweetheart, rouse all the passion in her nature if you will, but you—you talk of marriage! That is out of the question, absolutely out of the question. Young man, I tell you marriage for an artist is—death.”

Like a cameo, grim in its stern outline, the clear-cut features of the young Russian shone out against the blackness of his furs.

“You tell me this? You dare——” he began.

“Dare? I. Boy, you jest. Yes, I dare. I do more—I command you to pour all your love in her ear, make her life a paradise for a time—and then forget her. Bring the best that is in her to life, make her love you, teach her to love you—all women have to be taught; and when you tire, as you will, women who

are artists never keep love—they give too much—then leave her. That will be the making of her as an artist.”

Boris Alexanderowitch sat motionless, doubting the hearing of his own ears. Rubinstein had worked himself into one of his ungovernable rages, and all that was satanic and demoniacal in his nature was reflected in his strong and powerful features.

“He is mad; all real artists are mad,” Boris said to himself.

Rubinstein clenched his fist. “You hear, you hear,” he cried loudly, having waited in vain for some reply. “Petersburg is full of women—women to marry; women to become the mother of your children; women to set at the head of your household. But Louboff Malkiel is not of this type; she is not for you; she belongs to the world, to art; meddle with her career, and you will have me to answer to.”

They had reached the Annenkoff palace. Boris stepped out, his heart beating loudly, his limbs numb, partly with apprehension and nervousness, partly with cold. A sudden fear had firm hold of him.

Would they succeed, in spite of all his resolutions, in taking Louboff from him? Was

there truth in what Anton Rubinstein had pointed out so brutally?

"Well, Boris," broke in the suave tones of his uncle's voice, "playing the part of a knight-errant? Come, you, too, must see this séance out. Anton Gregoriewitch, you will see your pupil in my cabinet, and perhaps hear something that will make you regret your thoughtless zeal of this evening."

In the wake of Count d'Annenkoff, Boris and Rubinstein went through the corridors, swiftly, no one speaking.

When they entered Count d'Annenkoff's study they found it alive with officials. Louboff, seeing them, gave a little cry, and crouched back in her chair.

Boris was by her side on the instant.

"Courage, Louboff, sweetheart," he whispered. "We have come from the Tsar; we have your pardon."

All in the room rose at their entrance, but at a curt, impatient motion from the Count, they reseated themselves. Louboff was ghastly pale; her lovely eyes, half-veiled in confusion, sought those of Rubinstein questioningly, but he was looking straight ahead, indifferent as a sphinx to his surroundings.

Boris seated himself where he could see

Louboff and encourage her, taking a chair behind his uncle, who was directly facing her, only the writing table being between the two.

“Well, your Excellency, we have put all the questions you directed, but our success has been—er—poor,” said an individual in uniform, who sat next the Minister of the Interior.

The Count ran his eye along the sheet of paper lying on the table. He read the date of Louboff’s birth, her birthplace, the name of her father and mother, her profession, and then followed a long list of questions, to which was affixed the reply: “I do not know.” Several of these questions were vital; the answers to which, had they been given, would have afforded the Government all the links needed in various plots formed or being formed. The Minister frowned as he read.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, addressing the company in general, “has evidently told us as much as she intends to tell, and it is therefore a waste of valuable time to prolong this examination further; nevertheless, put these questions over again; General Rubinstein may find them instructive; he will certainly find sedition comes as easy to some of his conservatory pupils as crotchets and quavers.”

Rubinstein said nothing; he had lit his cigarette and was smoking placidly. Then quietly the harsh official voice read out the questions to Louboff, and Louboff gave again answers identical with those recorded.

Count d'Annenkoff's fine features were sarcastic, then at the close he said, with a smile so cruel and pitiless it made Louboff shiver:

"Well, General, that will do. I will now put a few questions myself.

"Louboff Antonivna, do you know Boris Gourowsky?"

She raised her eyes in startled surprise.

"I do."

"Was the acquaintance on your part premeditated or made by chance?"

On Boris' ears her answer fell like a thunderclap.

"Premeditated," she replied slowly, but the blood seemed to recede even from her lips and her eyes to dilate in the sudden anguish that had her in its grip.

"Bravo, Mademoiselle," said the Count quickly, and in sarcastic encouragement, "you are evidently recollecting the oath you had forgotten, and it is well, for we have letters to your brother which prove this premeditation and prearrangement."

Then he turned and gave Boris a mocking glance.

"And your object in this acquaintance-ship?" went on the steady voice of the Count, after a pause.

"To gather information for my brother."

"You are a Nihilist, Louboff Antonivna?"

"I am not. I do not think I am."

"Well, Louboff Antonivna, your master, Anton Gregoriewitch, used his personal influence with the Tsar to-night and gained your liberty. Some of the questions put to you just now, and to which you refuse to reply, are aimed at Nihilists and Nihilism. If you are not a Nihilist, why do you refuse us an answer?"

"Your Excellency, my brother is a prisoner, and a Nihilist. I cannot implicate him. My mouth is sealed for that reason."

"Ah." They were all looking at Louboff, admiring her fearless loyalty.

"Well, suppose now," went on the Count slowly and deliberately, "we gave you back your brother, would your replies be otherwise?"

She gave one piteous glance around, the glance of a hunted animal.

"They might," she whispered, after long

hesitation, during which all eyes were directed toward her.

“If so, then I can promise you your brother will be with you to-morrow.”

The Count made the promise resolutely, and Louboff’s eyes filled with tears of joy and emotion.

“Oh, your Excellency!” she cried, half rising in her seat, as she stretched out her hand in thanks.

The Count deliberately ignored her overture. He signed to the General by his side to begin once more the list of questions.

Boris listened with a bitter sense of pain and disgust. The room, with its uniformed occupants, the beautiful face of Louboff full of an anguish unspeakable as each answer was literally wrung from her, seemed to recede and recede, till it became a mere blur to his vision.

Finally, when it came to her giving the name of Michel’s associates, Louboff balked and found her memory at fault.

Count d’Annenkoff, rising, said sharply:

“Gentlemen, I will not detain you longer; these proceedings are becoming a farce. This girl has told us all she intends to tell; we may be satisfied.”

"I have told you all I know," said Louboff fearlessly. "Much more than I would were my brother's liberty not at stake."

"You have still to tell us," said Count d'Annenkoff, looking triumphantly toward Rubinstein, "for whom the bomb was meant that we found in your brother's possession. Will you swear to us you do not know?"

"Tell, Louboff, tell!" cried Rubinstein authoritatively, as her eyes sought his pleadingly.

"Will you give my brother back to me?" she demanded passionately of the Count.

"We will, most assuredly we will," he replied, his smile more sarcastic and disagreeable than ever.

"For the Tsar."

A shiver of real horror passed over the officials assembled. Rubinstein lifted his hands, then covered his face. Louboff alone was standing. Then she threw back her head and turned as an animal at bay.

"It is useless; useless," she cried, her voice ringing out clear, musical and passionate. "But, oh, your Excellencies, what other remedies have we? You have tortured us, goaded us, whipped us into revolt; we are behind the age as a nation, and the blood of

thousands, the miseries of generations, will not make you see. To-day, to-morrow, my brother and millions of others are ready to cry 'God bless our Tsar,' but we can cry it only in freedom, mean it only, when despotism ceases."

"Louboff!"

It was Boris who startled her into silence.

She gave one glance at the many pairs of eyes, stern, horrified, wrathful and menacing, all bent in her direction, then she fell backward in a dead faint, falling into the arms of Boris, who had rushed to her assistance.

For a few minutes there was some little confusion.

Boris poured some brandy between her closed teeth, then, dazed and despairing, Louboff revived.

"Boris, take me away from here," she sobbed in a whisper.

"One moment, sweetheart, courage, there are formalities," he pleaded soothingly.

Count d'Annenkoff took up a paper, signed it and gave it to the officer who had arrested Louboff. The latter read the paper and then said loudly:

"Louboff Antonivna Malkiel, you are discharged on the undertaking of his Excel-

lency, Anton Gregoriewitch Rubinstein."

"General, your undertaking has its dangers," said Count d'Annenkoff sarcastically.

"Your Excellency, I take the responsibility, and all its dangers, most gladly," Rubinstein replied coldly.

Louboff was clinging to Boris' arm, glancing from face to face, apprehensively. As soon as the perfunctory adieux were made, Rubinstein, Louboff and Boris went at once to the ante-chamber for their cloaks. None of them spoke till they reached the street, where the *iswostschiks* gathered round them, underbidding each other, and clamoring loudly for their patronage.

The trio paid no heed. Rubinstein looked at the two young people and said slowly and sternly:

"Louboff, I am horribly disappointed in you. What business has an artist with all this intriguing? You were led into it by your brother, I suppose, but——"

He got into the sleigh nearest to him and the expression of his face was not pleasant. "A pretty pothor you have raised," he went on petulantly. "Here it is almost dawn. I have lost four hours' sleep. It is most exasperating."

Then in a tone of command, he said curtly: "To-morrow is Sunday; I must break in on that day also because of this. Be at my house at ten o'clock, and notify Souroffsky to bring his violin. I will hear you both in the Kreutzer Sonata."

Without waiting for any reply, he said to the *iswostschik*: "Troitsky Pereulok."

"Anton Gregoriewitch," pleaded Boris, laying a detaining hand on the sleeve of the composer's cloak. "Think a minute. Louboff is ill; Louboff cannot——"

Rubinstein's blue eyes flashed fire.

"You go to the devil and cease your meddling!" he shouted roughly as he shook off the young man's hand, then in a kinder but still stern tone to Louboff: "Remember, ten to-morrow."

Together Boris and Louboff watched the retreating sleigh with its huddled figure of the great composer, then she said gently:

"Oh, Boris, never thwart him; he is not used to it, he hates it."

"Talk of autocrats," muttered Boris sarcastically. "But mind you," he flashed, "if you feel ill or too tired you won't go. I insist."

"Why, Boris, I would go if I were dying,"

she replied solemnly. "You do not know Anton Gregoriewitch. He never forgives. Things must go his way, or—or——"

Boris shrugged his shoulders and turned to the still clamoring sleigh drivers.

Once inside the sleigh, Louboff closed her eyes and did not speak for a few minutes; finally she turned to him, her face white and drawn.

"You still love me," she whispered piteously; "still even now when you know all, the whole truth?"

"Louboff, when I told you that I loved you something within me stronger than reason, stronger than life, stronger than my upbringing, spoke for me. Dearest, you have been misled, misguided, misinformed; that is all. I love you better now than before; I love you better with every beat of my heart. Sweetheart, I love you, love you, love you; that is all!" and he turned and kissed her with a fervor that carved forever in her remembrance the certainty and consciousness of his great love.

On reaching the house it took some time before a sleepy servant answered their ring.

"What about to-morrow, Louboff?" asked Boris.

"I will certainly be back from Rubinstein's about three; can you call about that time?"

"Yes, and I shall have something for you, sweetheart," he added smiling. Just then the door was opened, and he bent over her and made the sign of the cross on her forehead.

"Good night, little soul," he whispered, "and God bless you."

Boris dismissed his *iswostschik*, not knowing exactly what to do. The thought of returning to his uncle's house was most distasteful. Mechanically he turned into the Nevsky, wondering what hotel he had best select, and if it were wise to select any. At the Nobles' Club, on the corner of the Moeskaya, a group of people were descending, and, much to his confusion, Boris found himself face to face with his uncle.

The latter greeted him courteously.

"On foot?" he said interrogatively. "Well, it is lucky then I meet you. I presume you are on your way home. Jump in, Boris."

As soon as the horses had started, the Count laughed.

"Well," he said sneeringly, "this has been a lively evening for some of us. What do you think of your little Nihilist now?"

Boris did not answer; he bit his lips angrily.

"A beauty—a beauty, on my soul," went on the Count quickly. "Your taste, my boy, is perfect; she brings back to one's mind's eyes all the heroine beauties of the Bible. When the race does give us a siren it certainly outdoes all others. But, *mon Dieu*, picture to yourself what she will be in ten, fifteen, twenty years' time. However, do not worry, by that time," he added comfortingly, "ah, how your ideas will have changed. She is courageous, too, the minx—decidedly so. Imagine her facing us and giving voice to such sentiments! You stopped her too soon."

"She is only eighteen. What does she know of such things?" asked Boris in a low voice.

"Enough," said the Count quickly, "to do irreparable harm."

Boris shrugged his shoulders, then he said sullenly:

"You will keep your promise about her brother?"

"Oh, yes," replied the Count. Then in a tone of peculiar satisfaction he added: "Yes, yes; she will have her brother to-morrow, and

two weeks from to-day she will start for the frontier."

Boris could feel the blood recede from his heart as the Count spoke.

"She was going in any case," he said quietly for want of a reply. "She gives a concert in Berlin."

"So much the better; people will not remark her going, and you, my nephew, are therefore prepared."

"Is there anything you could do, my uncle, to rescind the order—even if after a year or two. You will not exile——"

"She will never put her foot in Russia again," said the Count hotly. "So long, at least, as I am Minister of the Interior. No, no, a self-confessed murderess of the Tsar! Good heavens, Boris, how love blinds one! You do not realize what you are asking. Well, here is the house, my boy. *Au revoir.*"

"One moment," said Boris detainingly. "As long as she is here, I—I mean to see her."

"I shall not prevent it; you do love her, I see that; therefore, have your little enjoyment. I am not beyond the memory of such things myself, and they are sweet, they are sweet—you will never realize how sweet till

you reach my age. No, go ahead, two weeks can do no harm; it will give you time to get over it. But remember your mother arrives in a day or two, and you will surely hide this infatuation from her, if you love her."

With these parting words the Count divested himself of his fur coverings and got out, the sleigh having stopped at the Palace Annenkoff.

CHAPTER XV.

It was with no little trepidation that Louboff entered Rubinstein's study the following morning. He greeted her as kindly as ever, but there was a look in his eyes she dreaded.

He was just about to commence what seemed a serious talk when, much to her relief, the violinist who was to accompany her in the Beethoven duet arrived. Rubinstein set them to work at once. For almost two hours they rehearsed steadily when Matvè announced luncheon. Rubinstein was in great good humor, and as they sat down he said, blowing her a kiss:

"Louboff, my little soul, do you know that to-day you have played—played like an artist? I could almost forget you are a woman."

Louboff's pale cheeks flushed. The strain of the night before had left its traces in her face and manner, but the languor in her countenance only added to its beauty.

"I have often wondered," he went on, "if I am not a fool to devote so much time to you—women, as artists, are such unsatisfactory creatures; one can neither rely on them nor

count on them; somehow they never do as you expect. I mean it," he added seriously. "Women as artists are failures; but I really believe, my *camarade*," he murmured affectionately, as he raised her hand to his lips, "that in thee I have found the one great exception."

"Anton Gregoriewitch," said Louboff softly, her manner animated, yet humble, "I sincerely hope so. No one has ever had such a master."

"Louboff, you will not fail me; you will be guided by an old world-weary artist who has fought the fight with himself, and knows? Will you accept my experience as—final?"

He still held her hand in his, and his glance rested on her with a pleading sadness that brought the tears to her eyes.

She believed he referred to the scene of the previous night.

"Anton Gregoriewitch," she began, and jumping up she went behind his chair and laid her cool, fresh cheek against his lovingly, her arms about his neck, "your commands will be my laws, now and always. There is nothing I am not ready to give up for you. Don't you know it?"

Rubinstein pressed her hands.

"Back to your soup, you witch," he said pleadingly, "this is luncheon time."

When Souroffsky rose to go, after luncheon, so, too, did Louboff, but Rubinstein stopped her.

"At two I have work to do," he said quietly, "but, Louboff, I must have a talk with you. *Au revoir*," he added carelessly to the young artist, who left instantly. "Come, Louboff."

He put his arm about her neck, and they went together from the salon to the study.

Rubinstein lit a fresh cigarette, then he bent the fingers of each hand from the knuckle; it was one of his characteristic exercises for keeping his fingers limber. Then he turned to her.

"Louboff, do you realize thoroughly what it means to belong to our brotherhood—our brotherhood of artists?"

She was not prepared for the question; she stammered an unintelligible reply.

"Do you realize how far above the others we are, the bigness and glory of our world, our calling? I ask this because I want to know if you have the stamina in you to reject that which the world at large calls happiness or fortune, and because Boris Alexandero-

witch informed me last night that you and he are betrothed."

Rubinstein's eyes were half closed, but she knew he was scrutinizing her closely, trying to mesmerize her into a confession true and complete, or else confuse her so that she would reveal her secret.

"We are," she replied slowly.

"And you will be married—some day?"

"Anton Gregoriewitch," she said earnestly, "what can I say? There are so many impediments in our way. It seems almost an impossibility. I hardly dare hope."

Her tone was matter of fact and very calm. Her interest in what she was saying was not extreme; she was too intent on finding out toward what he was drifting and in molding her replies to suit. "He is thinking of my career," she told herself.

Rubinstein smiled.

"Then it is not a matter of vital interest, Louboff?" he asked earnestly. "Marriage is not the final goal of all your hopes, as it seems to be of his? You are not enthusiastic; you are satisfied just—well, just to love him? You do love him?"

Again she was guarded.

"Perhaps," she replied with a blush, charming in its confusion.

Rubinstein drew down her face and kissed her on the mouth.

"Ah, Louboff, you will not disappoint me, and it is well; my hopes are centered on you, child. Be always true to my teaching."

"Then my marriage would displease you?"

"Marriage! It would be the end of your career. It's ruin."

"But you——"

"Ah! Leave me out. I was thirty-five years old; my career was made. It is sufficient that I give you counsel of a contrary nature."

Louboff smiled, unmoved in her intentions by his remarks. Rubinstein's commands had not swayed her one iota. She saw through the gloom and disappointments of life with the hopefulness and joy of her own youth. She had nothing to fear. Boris loved her; loved her in spite of all obstacles.

She was about to commence her career; she had Rubinstein's own assurance that it would be notable. And as to marriage, she was in no hurry; that could wait, for a time at least. Meanwhile, why not humor Rubinstein? She smiled again at her own deductions, then she arose and said quietly:

"See, it is almost two o'clock, Anton

Gregoriewitch. You must send me away."

"No, I have still something to say. I am responsible for you now, you understand that thoroughly?"

"Yes."

"And all this meddling with—with——" Rubinstein had the usual horror, like all the Tsar's subjects, of even mentioning the idea in his mind. He hesitated and nodded his head.

"Oh, yes, yes, Anton Gregoriewitch; I never realized how foolish it all was," she replied crestfallen.

"Altogether foolish; yes. See," said Rubinstein, pointing to a group of happy-looking moujiks opposite his windows, who stood together laughing and jesting, "that is Russia—they are content; we must be. Now go."

CHAPTER XVI.

Once out in the clear crisp of the afternoon, Louboff began to think over all that Rubinstein had said to her, and for the first time she had leisure to realize what a momentous change had come into her life.

A marriage with Boris! Once it had been a vague idea, a winged thought from fairyland, a hope that died in its analyzing; but now, he had indeed asked her, he had thrown all his prejudices to the winds—and some time—perhaps—in the dim roseate future, yes, they would marry.

She would be Countess Gourowsky. How could Rubinstein suppose for a moment that in comparison her career would be first with her; that much as she loved art she would give up Boris? She smiled at the mere thought; but she argued with herself:

“It is as well to keep Rubinstein satisfied. He is a great artist; one has to humor him and then he has done so much for me and has done it all so willingly.”

Little by little she went back over her betrothal of the night before; like an echo she

heard Boris tell of his love; the remembrance of the love light in his eyes caused a blush to rise to her cheeks. And then the awful moment of her arrest, her declaration; what a confession she had made!

She shrank at the memory of her own words; of the nightmare-like horror of the scene in the Annenkoff Palace. How lucky she was to get her freedom. She sighed as she thought how happily it had all ended. To-day Michel returns, she told herself, wondering why the fact seemed to matter so little to her; she could only think that in a short time, an hour at most, she would see Boris again.

At three he was to be with her. She took out her watch; it was then a little after two. A flutter of excitement went through her. It was her first love affair, and, oh, how supreme was her feeling of contentment.

Getting out of the sleigh, she gave the delighted and astonished *iswostschik* a rouble, telling him to keep the change, then feeling as if the world belonged to her, she nodded gaily to the porter sitting by the door and went in.

Going up the staircase, some one came out of a doorway in the hall, and, running after her, put his arms about her neck.

"It is Michel," she thought quickly, turning round to see. She found Boris.

"I was upstairs; they told me you were out, so I waited. Louboff, who would think all that has happened did happen! You look adorable, as fresh and lovely as a rose. Are you glad to see me, sweetheart? But not as glad as I am to see you."

He gave her no time to answer, and hand in hand they finished the rest of the climb, both of them breathless with happiness.

"No one was at home; Michel Antonowitch had not yet come; the *barin*, Anton Malkiel, had received a paper from the Ministerium and had hurried out," the servant told Louboff as he hung up their *shoubas*, side by side. The moment they were alone Boris put his arms about Louboff and they walked to the music-room.

"Tea?" asked Louboff.

"No, no, not unless you want it. I have something for you, what I told you of last night. Are you not curious?" Boris said, fumbling in his pocket. He pulled out a small jeweler's case, and, opening it, flashed before her eyes her engagement ring.

"Will it fit you? I could only guess, you know," he went on anxiously. "Oh, Louboff,

exact, exact!" he cried delightedly as he slipped the ring on her finger and found it fitted perfectly. "Sweetheart, it is a lucky omen," he said, kissing her.

Louboff laughed. "But, Boris, what extravagance. It is perfectly beautiful, the loveliest ring I ever saw," and she turned the ring with its two diamonds and turquoise admiringly round and round her finger. "But," she went on, "to take so much money away from your philanthropic schemes at Gourowsky——"

Boris flushed. "Oh," he said quickly, "that was bought with my uncle's money; he gave me a cheque yesterday for a thousand roubles. I live with him now." Boris then explained the causes of his moving from Wasily Ostroff.

Louboff's eyes were twinkling with inward and almost uncontrollable mirth. "If he knew," she whispered, and she flashed the ring back and forth in the sunlight, laughing.

Boris caught her idea and laughed, too.

"Now," she said quietly, "sit down; you must tell me all about last night. How was it ever managed? What luck is ours."

Bit by bit Boris told his story, and this led him up to the scene with Rubinstein, of which

he gave her a mere outline, omitting many of the master's theories on marriage.

"You must not mind that," she said soothingly. "Anton Gregoriewitch looks on me solely as a tool of art, a machine. You have no idea how he has made me work; and then he fears—all this to go for nothing—that marriage would mean my returning to private life." Looking up suddenly she asked, inquietude in her voice, "You never intend that, Boris, do you?"

"I—I have not thought about it, Louboff. I—all this is so new, so strange, it would be a queer thing for a Countess Gourowsky to play in public. But, dear," he added contentedly, "I will leave all that to you."

She put out her hand and grasped his affectionately. "We will arrange all that later. I will make my debut in two weeks, and then we will see. I may be a rank failure."

Boris shook his head decisively.

"And our marriage, Louboff," he asked, "when is that to be?"

"Oh, Boris," she sighed, and the shadows in her face deepened. "There are so many obstacles. There is your mother, your uncle; I must go to Berlin, you have to finish your studies."

"That event," he cried quickly, "happens this summer. After your debut in Berlin you play in several cities. Now after that?"

"And that reminds me," she said, rising, "that I have to practice."

"But you have not answered me," he insisted.

She was smiling and blushing.

"Well, in the summer then, but whatever you do keep all this from Anton Gregoriewitch. Just before I left him he was lecturing me."

"As if he or any one could come between us," Boris cried, as he put his arms about her, and, lifting her face to his, kissed her on the mouth.

She went to the pianoforte. Boris sat by the window while she ran through all the Rubinstein Barcarollen, and, as the afternoon wore along and it became evening, her mood changed and she became melancholy.

Once she stopped in her music and said apprehensively: "I wonder what keeps Michel; you are watching for him, are you not? He will come from the Petro Pavlovsky fortress over the bridge; you can see him where you are seated. Such terrible dreams

as I have had," she went on, sighing, then all at once she ceased playing and came beside him. In the dim twilight of the snow-laden streets a hearse, surrounded by a company of soldiers, passed over the bridge. Louboff's face had grown ashen pale.

"Why does Michel not come?" she said in agitation. "See that hearse; it was so in my dream. But, oh, God, Boris, Michel was inside it! I can see him still."

Boris put his arms about her protectingly. "It is an old saying that dreams go by contraries. A funeral means a wedding—yours and mine, sweetheart," he said, trying to be playful.

"Yes, yes; but did you never feel the looming up of some terrible misfortune?" she asked, awe and terror in her hushed voice, her eyes looking straight into his.

Her emotion seemed to infuse itself into his heart; a strange feeling of creepy horror came over him as together they turned to watch the funeral cortege slowly moving. Louboff clutched him tighter.

"Come, come," he said resolutely, trying to make his tone light and gay. "Why torture yourself, sweetheart? See, here comes a sleigh and a student in it. In the dim light

one cannot be sure, but I believe it is Michel. Yes, it must be he."

At that moment there was a ring at the doorbell.

"Yes, oh, yes," cried Louboff, "it is; you are right. Oh, heaven, what a feeling takes possession of one at times. Come, let us meet him," and her face assumed all its wonted brightness.

They hurried to the ante-chamber, and there they found not Michel, but an officer waiting.

"Mademoiselle, Count d'Annenkoff's compliments, Michel Malkiel is below," he said politely.

Louboff brushed past him, crying, "Where, where? Why does he not come up?" and followed by Boris, hurried downstairs.

As her foot touched the last step she gave a great moan of horror and threw her hands above her head.

Six stalwart soldiers were crossing the outer threshold carrying a coffin between them.

CHAPTER XVII.

Before Boris could stop her, Louboff was by the side of the coffin and had read the name "Michel Antonowitch Malkiel" at a glance.

Then an unnatural calm seemed to take possession of her. She looked up at Boris with stony eyes as silently they followed the grewsome object of death.

When they reached the apartment all was prepared in the chamber adjoining the ante-chamber; chairs were ranged against the wall, the center of the room was cleared. Only when the soldiers and undertakers crowded in did Louboff seem to realize her loss.

"Oh, God of my fathers!" she cried in Hebrew, as she stood by the coffin. "This is more than I can bear." Then the awfulness of her sorrow came home to her in all its force, and, throwing herself down on her knees, she rocked herself to and fro in her grief.

Boris, unable to gaze on a spectacle he had no power to alleviate, followed the officer in command as he left the room.

“When—when did this happen?” he asked, his voice trembling in spite of his efforts to control it.

“On the way to prison, the night of his arrest. He swallowed poison and died ten minutes later. Boris Alexanderowitch,” added the older man kindly, “why are you here? Do you not realize the danger? I knew your father; he was a good friend to me; I feel I can speak to you as I would to my own son. This is no place for you; get out of here.”

Boris was not listening; he was too busy thinking of his uncle’s treachery. Mechanically he thanked the officer as he left.

When he returned to Louboff she was standing by the coffin, calm once more, and the face of Michel, cold and awful in its serenity of death, stared up at them. The soldiers had all gone; only the weeping servants stood around. All at once Louboff cried fiercely:

“Boris, I am not a Nihilist; I was not. But what does this mean? But vengeance I will have. Examine his body, see if he died of torture before I can swear to you that I may not become one.”

Boris put his arm about her; with tender

love words he tried to calm her. But stories of the torture chamber had reached her. She would not be comforted. In spite of all his entreaties she insisted on his doing as she asked.

With the female servants she withdrew, leaving Boris a task that frightened him.

Ten minutes later he called her in.

“Louboff,” he said tenderly, “there is not a mark on his body—not one; he died of poison, by his own hand.” And then gently he told her what the officer had said.

“Thank God,” she said bitterly, “he was at least saved the torture chamber, and Siberia. It is well.”

All of them had forgotten the father, Anton Malkiel. He came in just then, and, dazed at first, looked and then went straight to the coffin. At sight of Michel’s face he gave one piercing shriek and fell across the bier, his arms outstretched.

“Oh, Michel, Michel, my son, have they taken you from me?” he moaned, and the glance of his old eyes as it passed from face to face of the saddened group in piteous appeal went to the heart of Boris. Louboff went over to him and put her arms about him.

“Oh, child, child,” he sobbed, “to-day I blasphemed against my God. They sent me a paper from the Ministerium, demanding that I, that you, with all my household, leave Russia within three weeks, and I cursed my God for allowing the Christians this glory over me. But now. Oh, Michel, Michel, my boy, what are worldly possessions in comparison to thee!”

Hours later Boris faced his uncle.

“It was cruel! it was horrible!” he cried in his anger at the powerful Minister, who sat watching him with calm insolence in his haughty eyes. “And you cheated her; you lied; you knew her brother was dead!”

Count d’Annenkoff shrugged his shoulders, and without taking notice of his nephew’s angry denunciation, remarked very calmly:

“All is fair in love and war; did I not give her back her brother as she asked?”

CHAPTER XVIII.

For three days after the funeral Louboff shut herself up in her room and would see no one. Listening outside the door, Boris could hear no sound of weeping within, nothing but a silence that terrified him, and he would rush for her maid to have her enter the room to see if matters were all right within.

All day long in the grief-stricken household there were sounds of hammering and the moving of furniture.

Anton Malkiel had sold his household effects at a great sacrifice among his friends, and bit by bit they were hastily removed, lest some greedy official come to demand them.

When Louboff at last emerged from her seclusion, Boris marveled, and was delighted to find her outwardly calm and composed, without wish to speak of the dead. "It has to be borne," she said once, when he mentioned Michel's name. "It is the will of God, but do not let us talk about it, my *camarade*; it is as much as I can do to think in fortitude. I must bear it, and I will bear it."

She had not even put on mourning.

"What does that matter?" she said with a shrug of lassitude, as she noticed Boris looking askance at her gown of gray woolen stuff. And Boris felt the truth of her remark. Grief such as hers was far too deep for any outward show.

She shuddered as they walked through the half empty rooms with their litter of packing cases and trunks. Only her music-room remained intact, the furniture of which was to be forwarded to Berlin, where she had decided to make headquarters.

"I cannot realize it," she said sadly. "To think that in another week I begin life anew, amid strange scenes, strange people, away from all the associations of home and friends I have known since childhood."

"But," whispered Boris, hopefully, "it will be only for a while. My mother comes tomorrow. She loves me, I know, better than her own life. My happiness is her whole concern, and after a time, when she knows you, she will see things as I see them. So your departure now has no significance.

"You will go to Berlin; you will make a great success; do honor to Rubinstein and please him. You will become famous, and then, just as soon as my studies are over and

I get my Government position, no matter how small that may be at first, I shall come for you, and we will marry. Then as my wife you will return to Russia, and, as the story books say, live happy ever after.

"The Gourowsky estate we will leave altogether to my mother, while she lives, and afterward—afterward, Louboff, you and I will end our days there and devote our lives to philanthropy."

She smiled back at him, her beautiful face shadowed by grief.

"I see nothing of all that," she whispered. "I see nothing."

Nevertheless they made their plans, such as they could make. Louboff promised to write him daily, no matter how busy she might be, if only one word; and Boris assured her that every Russian post would bring her an epistle, and that whenever his studies allowed he would cross the frontier just for a sight of her face.

That same evening a package of photographs of all sizes and kinds came: Louboff in evening dress, Louboff in walking dress, Louboff at the pianoforte. Boris pounced greedily on samples of each till he had placed aside some dozen in all for himself.

"But where will you put them all?" she inquired. "I will not have enough for the music shops of Berlin. What, too, will your uncle think, or your mother say? Believe me, Boris, you are unwise, if you have any intention, as you say, of decorating your room with these. You do not realize things as they are."

Boris laughed.

"The first thing my mother will see in my rooms will be this," he said, lifting up the largest and handsomest; "and she will ask, 'Who is that? What a beautiful face,' and I will reply, 'Beautiful indeed, mother. Your new daughter to be, and my betrothed, Louboff Malkiel, the future Countess Gourowsky.' "

Louboff blushed with pleasure, and, listening to him, the sorrow in her face grew lighter and the curves about her mouth less sad.

That day she played for him the greater part of her repertoire, and one of the smaller Nocturnes of Chopin she promised to include in all her programs as a souvenir of him, because it was his favorite.

From that on Boris was practically at home in the Malkiel household, coming and

going at will. Anton Malkiel had heard in terror the announcement of the betrothal, but had said practically nothing, partly from confusion, partly from apathy.

As to the anger that would have come to him a week earlier, that he allowed no place in his sentiments. The death of Michel, his first born and only son, seemed to have deadened every passion within him.

Boris he scarcely noticed. He ate his meals in silence and then went out to attend to the many business affairs consequent on his forced and hurried departure.

At midnight preceding the day of the Countess Gourowsky's arrival, Boris and Louboff were saying *au revoir*.

"Now to-morrow, sweetheart," he said somewhat diffidently, "I do not know when I can come; but you are sensible, you understand that."

"Perfectly, perfectly," she replied with a little smile sad in its forced resignation.

"My mother gets here early," he went on, "and she is sure to monopolize a lot of my time; but if nothing else, I shall be at Rubinstein's to take you home."

"Then come early. I shall be very lonely without you," she said gently, and Boris, as

he kissed her, made up his mind to be with her for at least an hour during the day.

When the train from Moscow steamed into the station, Boris, who was far ahead on the platform, caught sight of his mother's eager face leaning out, looking for him, and, running along with the train till it stopped, shouting out his greetings, he found himself in a few moments more clasped in her arms.

"My boy," she said fervently, and as his nostrils scented once more the old familiar odor of violets, faint, yet aromatic, that always perfumed her person, and felt her strong protecting arms about him in that maternal embrace, so different to all others, his lips trembled and his eyes grew moist.

This was the old love of his childhood, the old love he had so completely forgotten of late in the newer, stronger, passion inspired by Louboff, and as he looked down into the beaming face raised to his he felt ashamed.

There was something searching and penetrating in the glance she gave him—kind as it was—that caused him to redden, and her startled, "Why, Boris, my boy, what is it? You have changed. You have grown up all at once into manhood," gratified him beyond words.

“Why not, mother?” He pitched his voice to a deeper tone proudly. “I am a man.” whereat the Countess Gourowsky sighed.

“Yes, you have grown,” she added, surveying him.

“And you, mother dear, you have widened.” He laughed teasingly, knowing that any allusion to her increasing bulk was sure to make her forget for the moment every other subject.

“Alas, yes; in spite of all I do.”

Then they entered the sleigh and were driven rapidly to Count d’Annenkoff’s palace on the Neva.

During the drive the Countess plied Boris with all kinds of questions as to his studies, his life in general, and all the time Boris was wondering when the moment would arrive wherein he would have sufficient courage to tell her of Louboff.

“Mother,” he said at length, “what put it into your head to come to St. Petersburg? I thought nothing would make you desert Gourowsky.”

“And nothing would have,” she replied, turning her eyes half sternly on him, “but your interest.”

Boris wondered what she meant exactly,

but had not the courage to ask. Besides they were just stopping before the palace.

Boris had jokingly informed Louboff that it was her photograph that would be his mother's first intimation of their betrothal, and so it proved.

As soon as the long ceremonial of welcoming the Countess was over, Boris led her to their apartment, and, going through it from room to room, at last halted in his study, where the pictures of Louboff were conspicuously placed over the bookcase, on the writing table, and one of the largest on an easel.

As they entered the room Boris turned to his mother, expecting a cry of pleasure and surprise to fall from her lips over the beauty of the lovely Oriental face. Instead, she raised her lorgnette, and, looking at the picture, said carelessly:

"Why, what have we here, Boris? A music-hall singer, an actress?" Then going closer, she gave one long, scrutinizing look, and, turning to him, said chidingly, and with a shiver of disgust: "Faugh! Faugh! Boris! A Jewess!"

"Mother—mother, is she not beautiful?" he queried, real distress in his tones.

“After a fashion, yes; but——”

Then turning to Boris, hardly able to keep up the farce longer, she added hastily: “But why so many of the same person? Is it possible that you know her—a Jewess?”

“Yes, mother, I know her,” he answered confusedly, feeling as if his very heartstrings were snapping. “I know her,” he added bravely, “and she is my betrothed. Her name is Louboff, Louboff Malkiel—and she is a pupil of Rubinstein.”

For the first time in their joint lives the Countess felt her grasp on him had weakened, and the very bitterness of death came to her heart. He was her son—all that fate had spared to her, and yet no longer her son as of old. Another woman had taken her place, usurped her power—a Jewess, at that—and she, his mother, was no longer the pivot about which his affections centered.

She sank down on a divan.

“Boris,” she said weakly, and then she laughed, half hysterical in her pain and sorrow, “Boris, you joke, and it is a cruel joke to me, your mother. Betrothed, at your age!”

He fell on his knees beside her and kissed her hand.

“Mother, I am a man; I am no longer a boy; and Louboff——”

“Oh, my boy,” she interrupted, “you are only a child, only a child, still in spite of your six feet of height; and you rush off like a silly fellow and betroth yourself; you dignify calf love into a passion.”

Boris could see her bosom heaving with emotion, and all the eulogies he had ready of Louboff died on his lips, stifled by her interruption. Then she bent over his head and began to stroke it lovingly.

“Boris, my son, how could you?” she went on in motherly fashion, with the tone and manner of reproving a small child. “And to do all this without letting me know. Why——”

“But it came on me all so suddenly,” he said simply. “I was head over ears in love before I realized it myself.”

The Countess laughed as one amused beyond control, and Boris could feel his first sentiment of anger against her grow within him as he listened. Seeing his sullen face, the Countess became doubly afraid.

“Mother,” he said, at length, “it is useless to argue in this matter. My mind is made

up. You don't know Louboff, but when you do——”

The Countess took up the photograph.

“Why, I don't see any beauty in her,” she remarked with a shrug. “How very strange, my son, that you should have become bewitched by such—such——”

Boris raised his face, brooding, impatient, scornful.

“You understand, mother dear,” he said sweetly, but coldly, “my betrothed. I hope you realize this——”

“I think, Boris, I hardly do.”

At that moment luncheon was announced, and, jumping up, Boris gave his mother his arm, glad of the fact that Count d'Annenkoff had insisted on his sister lunching with him that day.

As the day wore along Boris was conscious only of one thing: the society of his mother, for the first time in his life, failed to satisfy him. He found his thoughts constantly wandering to Louboff, longing for her, wondering jealously about her movements; but the Countess Gourowsky kept him chained to her side.

He went with her to St. Isaac's; he made calls with her on some relatives; and all the

time the impatience of his surroundings became more acute. But it was the first day of her arrival, he told himself, and as a matter of duty his time belonged to her, so he forced himself to be cordial, and all the time the keen eyes of his mother noticed the difference; and the jealousy and hatred of this unknown woman who had supplanted her in his affection grew.

At the dinner table he said, when coffee was served, relief and joy in his voice:

“And now, mother, I must leave you. I am going to Rubinstein’s to take Louboff home.”

For a moment the Countess hesitated, studying her son meanwhile intently, then she said quietly:

“To Rubinstein’s? Why, if you have no objection, I will accompany you. It will be like old times to see our great Anton Gregoriewitch again.”

Boris looked up in amazement. For a moment he seemed nonplussed, then he smiled.

“Why, come along!” he cried, and his joy at her decision was suddenly extreme. “At Rubinstein’s,” he told himself, “she will hear Louboff play, and therefore make her acquaintance in the best possible fashion.”

CHAPTER XIX.

“The Count and Countess Gourowsky,” announced Matvè, and with an expression of keen delight, Rubinstein hurried forward, and, raising the Countess’ hand to his, was greeted by her, Russian fashion, with a kiss on the forehead.

Then he turned and said quietly and formally:

“Countess, allow me to present my pupil, Louboff Antonivna Malkiel. A very great pianist, whom you will hear much of, one day,” he added flatteringly.

Louboff, who had nervously greeted Boris, came forward and bowed to the great lady, who looked her over so critically, then something pathetic in the young girl’s beauty—something winsome and sweet in her small figure, in its clinging robes of white woolen stuff—awoke the sympathies of the Countess.

“Ah,” she said, extending her hand graciously, so white and statuesque against the deep purple of her velvet gown, “my son has already spoken of you, Louboff Antonivna, and I have seen your picture. I

think," she added, turning a swift glance on the mollified Boris, "they hardly do you justice."

"Now, Louboff," said Anton Rubinstein authoritatively—when there was business to be done he was always energetic—"get to the pianoforte. The Countess," he added, "I know, will excuse you. Mademoiselle Malkiel makes her debut in Germany two weeks hence, and must play over the program of that concert to-night," he said in explanation, turning to Boris' mother. "We two will sit here quietly and chat. I think you will be interested," he whispered, as Boris and Louboff went to the pianoforte, the former assisting her in opening it. "A really great talent, and she has everything besides—youth, beauty, industry. I expect her to become one of the shining lights of the Conservatory."

Rubinstein was visibly nervous; Louboff herself seemed indifferent. Boris having left her, she sat down to the pianoforte, while the Countess scrutinized her covertly. "She certainly is beautiful; more than beautiful; sympathetic, most magnetic in personality," thought the older woman uneasily.

With fearless attack, broadly, her tone beautiful in its singing quality, Louboff com-

menced one of the Bach Preludes and Fugues.

In her younger days, when a *dame d'honneur* of the Empress Marie, and when Rubinstein was the bright and shining light of the Grand Duchess Hélène's Court, Countess Gourowsky, then Mdle. d'Annenkoff, had been one of his most promising pupils, and her knowledge of music was therefore thorough. As soon as Louboff had finished the Prelude and commenced the Fugue, one of the most difficult of the forty-eight, the Countess turned, really surprised, and said to her old master with enthusiasm:

"Surely a marvelous talent, and so young!"

"Yes, but wait till you hear her Beethoven, superb; and her Chopin"—he kissed the fingers of his right hand—"exquisite. Poor child, she has just lost her brother. I was afraid it would mean nervous breakdown, but I insisted on her giving the concert as arranged, and the hard work seems to have had a beneficial effect. There is only one thing," continued the great musician after a pause, as Bach's music filled the room with its sonorous harmony, "I hope she will fall in love."

The old-time pupil and master looked at each other meaningly.

Then the Countess said with her slow smile of *grande dame*: "Say it, Anton Gregoriewitch, you think my Boris and——"

Rubinstein shrugged his shoulders; then he laughed.

"It looks like it."

"But it is foolish; it is impossible."

"I know, and therefore I am glad of it. It will be the making of her as an artist." Then he added, his blue eyes fiery in their penetration: "That is why you are here, Countess."

"Hush! He must not know."

Rubinstein put his finger to his lips, and at that moment Louboff finished and looked round.

Rubinstein got up, and, going to the pianoforte, put his arm about her. "Little soul, you have played well. Only play so at the concert and you will do yourself honor. Now," he added, straightening himself and looking at the two auditors triumphantly, "now, for a great feat: the Op. 106 of Beethoven."

Louboff dusted her fingers with the lace handkerchief she had put on the folded desk of the pianoforte, bit her lips, looked over at Boris with a smile, then, like a clarion call, there rang out the majestic chords of Beethoven's masterpiece.

The Countess allowed her eyes to rest benignantly on Louboff. From time to time Rubinstein ran his fingers through his hair with a grunt of approval and an occasional loud bravo. Boris could feel every pulse in his body beating madly. Louboff herself seemed like one possessed as she grappled with the enormous difficulties, technical and intellectual, surmounting all in a fashion that brought from Rubinstein as she finished the exclamation: "*Colossal!*"

Trembling, worked up to pitch almost hysterical, Louboff came and stood up by Rubinstein. He took her in his arms and felt her slight figure shaking in his grasp.

"Louboff, Louboff, to-night I know your success is assured!" and, bending down, he kissed her affectionately.

"Mademoiselle," said the Countess, "I have not heard in ages such playing as yours; never certainly from a woman. Let me congratulate you, too, child," and, also taking Louboff in her arms, she kissed her on both cheeks.

"And I," said Boris. "Louboff," he began and hesitated—his mother and Rubinstein were both watching him with curious eyes—then he raised her hand to his lips, in

spite of her resistance, and kissed them with a fervor that made the two elder people seek each other's eyes with a surreptitious glance.

Matvè brought in the tea, and for half an hour Rubinstein insisted on Louboff resting. Then she went again to the pianoforte and for more than an hour played Chopin.

It was then that Countess Gourowsky understood the full extent of her witchery and charm, the emotional beauty of soul in her that had so entirely enslaved her son.

There was but one encomium possible. She played divinely. All the pathos and loveliness of Chopin's were revealed with a master touch, thrilling the hearts of her hearers through and through.

"Genius, artist, young, beautiful—yet a Jewess. Did ever Russian mother have so difficult a task before her?" the Countess thought dejectedly. Then all the old d'Annenkoff instincts awoke within her; the *finesse* and diplomacy that had made the men of her race famous as statesmen for generations came to her assistance. When Louboff had finished the Countess went over to her, and, sitting beside her, began such eulogies as delighted the heart of the young artist.

Boris looked on well pleased. He gave his

mother every opportunity, laughing and chatting himself with Rubinstein, who was in great good humor.

A little before eleven Matvè announced that the Countess' sleigh was waiting. Boris stood up. "You will excuse me, mother dear," he said somewhat diffidently, "I cannot return with you, as I have to see Mademoiselle Malkiel home."

The Countess turned to him with her sweetest smile. "Boris," she said quietly, but with the air of one who has weighed matters and come out the conqueror, "I intend to give myself that pleasure. Louboff Antonivna, you will let me be your chaperone?"

Blank dismay fell for a second on the two young faces, but Louboff was quickest to recover herself.

"You do me too much honor, Madame," she faltered.

"*Ma chere*, the honor is mine," responded the Countess blandly, as she turned to bid Rubinstein *au revoir*.

Boris saw them cloaked, bringing them to the sleigh. On returning, he faced Rubinstein, who was waiting for him, a peculiar smile on his face, partly cynical, wholly sarcastic.

“You are,” said Rubinstein, with disdain, “the picture of woe and disappointment. Well, Boris Alexanderowitch, be a man and bear up under it. It comes to all of us!” Then his mood changed and he said genially, “You don’t know how lucky you are to be able to feel so.”

Boris tried to smile and laugh off the sallies of the great composer, but his success was poor. A few minutes later he left the house, rage and disgust in his heart.

CHAPTER XX.

Long before his mother had risen, long before the household of the Palace Annenkoff had shaken off slumber, Boris was out and away to the Moika.

At Louboff's house the still sleepy servants greeted him with surprise.

"Do not wake the *barishyna*. Do not tell her I am here," he said smiling. "Just give me some tea; I will wait for her."

Almost two hours later, when Louboff came to the music-room for her morning practice, she found him there, smoking and reading the morning papers.

"Oh, Boris," she said, her face lighting up with delight, "how nice of you! I feared I was never going to see you again." Then pausing, she said pleadingly and half poutingly, "Do let us enjoy the remaining days and be together as much as possible; there are only four more. Oh, how lonely I was yesterday. I could not work, I could not practice, I kept watching for you all day."

Boris could not help contrasting his feelings with hers, and finding them identical his spirits rose.

“Yes,” he said eagerly, “and was it not mean of mother? Oh, Louboff, when I saw you go off with her it almost broke my heart. I had been looking forward all day to that one little half hour. It was really a crime on her part.” Then he added anxiously, “And how did you get along with mother? How did she strike you?”

“Boris—well—well, I hardly like to say. You see, dearest, she is your mother, and therefore I hesitate about giving you my impressions; they may not be right.”

“No, no; say just what you think,” he interrupted eagerly.

“Well, she gave me the impression of being *tres grande dame*, and worldly; quite different to the idea you had given me in your description of her.” Then Louboff shivered a little as one who has cold, and drew closer to him. “But I don’t want any outside influence to spoil our last days together, Boris. I mean just to revel in your love, forgetting the world, forgetting the future, forgetting all things but that just you are you, and that we are together.”

It was all that he could get her to say of his mother in the days that ensued. Adroitly, cleverly and most carefully, she avoided all

mention of the Countess in their conversation, and on the few remaining occasions that they saw each other she gave herself up, as she said, to a delirium of happiness, born of the knowledge that Boris loved her and loved her passionately.

On the night of the second day of her arrival the Countess, who had only seen her son for a moment—he had spent the day with Louboff—waited for him in his study.

Her emotions were many. She sat in the stillness, thinking over the past, remembering her son as a curly-headed cherub, who adored her and would not be comforted in her absence. She saw him a lad, devoted, chivalrous, always dreading the inevitable separation that must come when his college days began. She contrasted all that with his present attitude. He hardly seemed the same Boris. He had slipped out of her grasp, turned from her.

At last she heard his footsteps, and all the maternal pride in her heart awakened. He was so handsome, so manly.

She smiled up at him, nevertheless she said reprovingly:

“You certainly keep late hours, Boris. When do you get time to study?”

"I am giving myself a little holiday these days," he said moodily. "Louboff goes away Monday, and it is going to be a long separation I am afraid; almost three months until my vacation. I am going to be very neglectful of you, mother, for a little while," he added, coming up and putting his hand on her shoulder affectionately, "but I know you understand the circumstances and will forgive me."

The Countess felt anything but flattered at his frank admission and consequent deduction. A bitter reproach rose to her lips, but, looking up, she saw it would be useless; his face wore a sad, dreamy, far-away expression. He was not thinking of her, not even thinking of what he was saying, but of the new interest that held his fancy so completely captive.

"Well," she said at length, and with affected carelessness. "Boys, Boris, will be boys, and this first love affair of yours, of course, seems a most serious fact."

"Mother," he said abruptly, his patience not proof against her doubting assertion, "it is a fact, a most serious fact; you still do not realize that it is a betrothal, that some day you will have to take Louboff to your heart as your son's wife."

"Now, Boris," she said, smiling indulgently, "do not let us misunderstand each other. You are not twenty-one yet, and I am old and experienced. We will say nothing further about this betrothal till your birthday, a year hence—and then, well, then, if you come to me and still insist, I am ready to 'take her to my heart,' as you say, and give you both my blessing."

Boris flung his arms about her boyishly, his face radiant.

"Mother! Dearest, sweetest, and best of mothers, you mean this?"

"Surely, my boy."

"Then it is assured, settled; and, oh, mother, I do appreciate your kindness and greatness of heart, your love for me, for I know your prejudices."

"Well, then, be happy, dear," she said, kissing him; "so run off now and sleep soundly." Then, a sudden thought coming to her, the Countess said graciously: "Since I will not see you because of your preoccupation, why not bring Mademoiselle Malkiel here to luncheon, to dinner, or any time you like that she is free?"

Boris again embraced her rapturously, feeling as if all good fortune were coming his

way, and, looking up into his frank, bright eyes, the Countess' own fell in their first confusion before those of her son.

"Mother has consented to our betrothal," shouted Boris to Louboff the moment of their meeting next day.

Louboff wrinkled her pretty eyebrows.

"Consented!" she whispered in awe. Then she listened to his story, and smiled wisely. She made no remark.

"You must come to luncheon to-day," he finished. "You are expected."

"To-day? Friday? Oh, no, Boris, not to-day; I would not care to enter your house for the first time on a Friday."

"But it would not be the first time," he said quickly. "You were there before; you know it is the house of my uncle. So, Louboff, sweetheart, run and get on your things at once. Mother expects us. Put on your pretty heliotrope frock—the one I first saw you in—and wear your sable cloak, the one with the diamond clasps," he added eagerly.

"Boris, at times you are such a boy," she said tenderly, and, drawing down his head, she kissed him on the mouth and then, Russian fashion, on each eyelid.

She followed his advice, however, as he

noted with glee, and they went at once to the Annenkoff palace. Vera d'Annenkoff was there, and the moment Boris' mother caught sight of Louboff she rose and greeted her cordially. Then, with her arm about her, led her forward to her niece.

"Vera," she said smiling, "this is Made-moiselle Louboff Malkiel. Perhaps I ought to introduce her more correctly as the betrothed of Boris, but you young people ought not to betroth yourselves too readily, so I will merely say that in all probability you will know her one day as your cousin."

Vera d'Annenkoff had been trained in her father's way. She showed no surprise, not even by the quiver of an eyelid.

"I am delighted to meet you," she said in easy fashion, "and I congratulate you both." She looked over at Boris and smiled knowingly. "She has the most beautiful face I ever laid eyes on," she whispered a few moments later to the gratified young man, as they followed the Countess and Louboff in to luncheon.

The luncheon was pleasant and the attitude of the Countess charming. Louboff was forced to leave early; when the Countess saw her depart in the company of Boris she said gaily:

“Now, remember, Louboff Antonivna, come to luncheon or dinner; you will always find me. You know it is the only way I can get a glimpse at all of my son.” Then she bent and kissed the lovely flushed face, with its glory of youth and happiness, and said, turning to Boris: “You hear, Boris? Insist on her coming.”

On Saturday evening, much against her will, Boris brought Louboff to dinner, and just as they were rising from the table a servant came, asking Boris to attend on his Excellency, Count d’Annenkoff, for a few minutes.

Boris excused himself and went unsuspectingly. Then, the Countess knowing the coast was clear for an hour at least, got the long talk she wanted with Louboff.

She was all kindness and delicacy, and a very real and true affection seemed to look out of her handsome eyes, so like those of Boris in color, so unlike in expression, as she took Louboff’s hand protectingly.

“I speak, my dear,” she said softly, “as your friend, but more especially as the mother of Boris.” Then quietly, insidiously, cunningly, she laid before the heartbroken Louboff what the consequences of any marriage

between herself and Boris would be—his complete and absolute ruin, socially and financially.

Louboff needed no convincing; she knew all that the Countess had to tell her—she knew even more about her Russia and the Government than the elder woman did; but when the latter said softly: “A woman is always older than a man at your age; you have twice the wisdom of Boris; I leave the whole matter in your hands and to your decision.” Louboff could have screamed aloud in her agony.

And Louboff in her youth, in her generosity, and in her love, was as wax in the hands of the Countess, who had behind her pleadings all the wiles and cunning of her forty years’ experience.

“Now,” finished the Countess, “to come between a great love—even if it would save my son from ruin—is something I could not do, but Louboff Antonivna, what is real love? What is great love? What is true love? Is it not that which sacrifices self for the benefit of the one beloved? Life is so short, so short. See me; I loved Boris’ father; we were happy, ah, so happy; but now I am alone, and it is all a memory, and all the bitterer, I assure you, because a memory of great happiness. I

do not hesitate, my child, to say that many, many times when my sufferings were greatest I regretted that I gave way to the love that was later to cause me such anguish, and that in the beginning I did not stifle it. We are not made for happiness—that comes in the life beyond, and comes to us best through sacrifice.”

Louboff listened dry-eyed. It was all as she had told Boris a hundred times. A marriage between them was impossible, absolutely impossible, and she thanked God in her heart she had her art. “Without that it would be suicide,” she told herself in the abjectness of her misery.

“Do not spoil the last remaining days of your stay,” went on the soft, sweetly modulated voice of the Countess, with its mellow timbre. “Let him believe in the possibility of blue roses, if he will, but for your own good, and for his, write to him from Berlin and give him back his troth.

“It will be cruel, it will rack his heart; but in the end, as I see it, as I know you see it—and as all must see it, for fate has so willed it—it is irremediable: the only kindness you can do him.

“And then you are both young, and youth

has so much vitality with which to fight suffering. Louboff, I know you are true and honest; I know you realize all the pain this costs me, but I am his mother, you, Louboff, his sweetheart. We have this one motive in common, his welfare, and it is ours equally, because we love him."

"I will do as you say," Louboff whispered after an agonized pause. "But oh, my God, Madame!" she added wildly, "just for one moment let me be alone."

The Countess rose and kissed her. Louboff could feel one heavy tear fall on her cheek from the older woman's eyes. Then the Countess left her, closed the door softly, and waited outside for Boris to come.

Half an hour later someone tapped at the door. Louboff was at the pianoforte, pouring out all her heart in the sorrow-laden harmonies of a Chopin Prelude, and there Boris found her.

Her face was ghastly, her eyes wild and gleaming with strange light playing in their sombre depths.

When she had finished the Prelude, Boris went up to her.

"You are tired, dearest. Play no more," he said gently, thinking that memories of

Michel caused by the poignant melancholy of the music were haunting her.

“Yes, Boris, I am tired,” she said simply, “take me home.”

“Where is my mother?” he asked, looking round in the shadows of the room.

“If she has gone,” said Louboff firmly, “do not disturb her. You can make my adieux. She was here till a little while ago.”

“Yes, just fancy,” he said aggrievedly, “Alexei Alexeiwitch was upstairs and I had to take the fourth hand at whist. I played so abominably on purpose that they finally sent me off; otherwise, I suppose, I would be playing still. My thoughts were with you all the time,” he added fondly.

Louboff shivered.

“Come, Boris,” she said, her face growing whiter and whiter. “I am tired, dreadfully tired, sweetheart.”

CHAPTER XXI.

Boris had warned Louboff the day before to have nothing to do on Sunday: that that day must belong to him, and he would call for her at noon. "It is a surprise," he said in his bright boyish way, "and I will not tell you anything about it till the time comes."

Louboff despite her grief and misery had not forgotten. She had passed a sleepless night, a night so wretched that many times only the sorrow to Boris kept her thoughts from running on self-destruction. In the morning toward eleven she roused herself, dressed carefully, then drinking several small glasses of cordial, some ten minutes before twelve stood ready waiting for him.

A gaily decorated sleigh came over the bridge; the driver, big and stalwart, swathed to the teeth in furs and driving the three horses abreast skilfully, she recognized as Iván, one of the d'Annenkoff coachmen; and Boris, in his sables, jumped out of the sleigh the moment the horses drew up before the door.

"A day in the Islands, Louboff, that is my

surprise," he said gaily, as he brought in with him a whiff of the cold, bracing outside air and kissed her with lips icy of touch. Then he laughed at her affected pleasure. "I have three of my uncle's fastest horses; furs enough to smother in, and luncheon is ordered. Best of all you are mine, sweetheart, for the day, and no one can infringe on a moment of our time."

With a mighty effort Louboff threw off her gloom and her sadness; the spirit of Boris was exhilarating. She determined that, come what would, that one day at least she would snatch from the cruelty of fate—for one day she would let no thought of the future disturb the certainty of her present happiness.

She was cloaked in a few minutes, and they entered the sleigh with much difficulty, so restive and spirited were the horses; then they dashed into the Nevsky, through the wide semicircle of the Winter Palace, and all along the Palace Quay at a breakneck speed and over the bridge to the Kamenoi Ostroff road.

The air was like wine in its intoxicating effect, the big, blue-tasseled net kept the snow, ground to a powder under the feet of the magnificent Orloffs, from hitting their faces, the

whole earth seemed to fly from under them, and the strange, delirious sensation of surging through clouds intoxicated their senses.

They entered the great forests, the trunks of the gigantic pines covered with icicles showing black as ink against the white of the landscape. At last, half frozen in spite of their heavy furs, they drew up before the Chalet, where Boris had ordered luncheon.

During the meal he further confided his secret to take her to see the Palace Gourowsky near by. "We rent it out yearly, now," he said candidly, "for the sake of the revenue, but when we are married, Louboff, and I have my Government position, why, of course, we will occupy it in the summer."

Louboff felt she could say nothing, but gave him a sympathetic look and smiled.

He began to talk of the future. She listened as one who hears a story read.

"Why do you say nothing?" he asked suddenly. "You have no enthusiasm."

"I do not see it. I do not see it," she answered sadly.

"Oh, you pessimist, come and be persuaded," he laughed, rising, luncheon being over. They set off again in the white stillness of the outside world; no sound but the trot of

the horses' feet, the rattle of the silver harness and the fusic of the silver sleighbells.

Above the sky was intensely blue, the sun shone brilliantly, and Boris enthusiastically pointed out landmark after landmark, where Louboff could only see icicles, snow or trees. Then they reached the palace, all boarded up and desolate looking. They were expected, for a man in sheepskin brought them inside, and the big stove in the dining-room was lighted. Then Boris took her all over the house—one of the showplaces of the Islands.

In the picture gallery, where hung scores of dead and gone Gourowskys, he pointed out a vacant place. "Your picture will be there," Louboff," he said fondly, "painted by Mark-off, and you will be one of the loveliest of the Countesses."

He insisted on showing her the garden; everything was under snow, but he made the wintry landscape bloom. He pointed out great clumps of snow-buried bushes. "These are lilacs," he said, "white and violet; their odor strong enough to make one faint. In a few months more it is a paradise here: the laburnums will be golden and the ground one huge bouquet of double violets and white narcissi. Oh, if you were only here!"

“Boris,” she said quickly, “gather me a bunch of violets here when springtime comes, and, even though they wither on the way, send them to me as a remembrance of to-day.”

“No,” he said eagerly, “as a token of days to come.”

After that, through miles and miles of forest, they drove madly, till the breath seemed to leave their bodies and the icy atmosphere froze their lashes so that they had difficulty in seeing.

The desolation of the magnificent winter scene was awe inspiring, and when the declining sun sent its purple and fiery colors over sky and land they were speechless with an overpowering sense of wonder and delight at the grandeur before them.

The light faded, rose and scarlet and heliotrope, with shafts of gold and flame color shot through and through, gleamed through the blackness of the trees, gradually disappearing to shadows. It grew still colder, the sky bluer, the gloom of night succeeded the opalescence of evening and the stars came out in thousands.

Boris had his cheek against hers. As they rushed onward in the blue gloom he was whispering love words that made her heart break

and tortured her. At times it seemed as if it were all a dream, a dream at once beautiful and horrible, a dream that paralyzed reason and gave her the delirium of life's fullest emotions.

They had dinner at the Chalet. Afterward the gay group of gypsies, that are a feature of life in the Islands, gathered around them and Louboff saw their graceful dances for the first time and listened to their playing and singing.

All at once the artist in her woke. She became interested, she forgot the parting of the morrow. The music of Liszt, of Brahms, with newer, deeper meaning, stimulated her intellectual senses. She asked that the pianoforte be opened, and for a while the gypsies sat or stood around, wild with enthusiasm over her playing.

It was a night of delirium and joy. Boris brought her home at midnight, and the wild drive through the darkness of the woods and then through the streets of the city that glittered and sparkled as if diamond strewn was dream-like; Boris held her in a clasp that love alone can give.

They reached the Nevsky, and the bells of the city churches broke on the stillness. "Oh,

Boris, it is over!" she cried in anguish, as they tolled to her ears like a funeral knell.

"Sweetheart," he cried passionately, "it has only begun!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The day of Louboff's departure arrived. Boris was with her early. He found her flurried and agitated, a dozen things claiming her attention at once. Everything in her music-room had been boxed and packed the day before, but other things remaining to be done seemed endless. He could hardly get a second of her attention.

Then it was time to drive to the station, and once there they found the place besieged. Relatives, friends, schoolmates, artists: they were all there to wish her godspeed; only a few of them knew of her exile, but all of them knew she was starting on her career as an artist.

Boris found himself elbowed away, pushed aside, lost in the wave of humanity that surged and thronged about her. If he tried to reach her, her friends would grasp on all sides and claim her instant attention. And she, bewildered, excited, almost hysterical, seemed to have no will of her own, to follow, answer, listen at random.

It was almost the moment of parting; suddenly she extricated herself.

“Boris!” she cried despairingly, as she stretched out her arms toward him; he caught her in a grasp of iron, “Oh, Boris, Boris!” she wailed passionately, then a deadly faintness overcame her.

They led her to her compartment in the train; Boris knelt at her feet and kissed her hand repeatedly. He was utterly unconscious of his surroundings; he saw nothing but Louboff’s face, deathly pale, the half-closed eyes that looked agonizedly into his own. A hand grasped him by the shoulder; they told him the train was starting, and bending over her he screamed out to her to kiss him; a faint pressure alone of her lips answered the hot, maddened hunger of his own.

He was dragged from the carriage, the train steamed off, and in a haze he found himself surrounded by strangers, all friends of hers, who were weeping loudly at her departure.

He pushed past them to his carriage, hot tears stinging his eyes, and the desolation in his heart almost unbearable.

It was the carriage that had taken her to the station, and the perfume of the roses she had carried—the roses he had given her—still lingered about it. He stooped and saw some

of the frail petals at his feet. The reality of her departure came to him as a sudden blow. Every moment made it more real.

He began to curse himself as a fool and an imbecile. He had wanted to say so much to her; he had planned it all, had it all in readiness, but he had left it all unsaid. Things came back to him in a flash. "Have I made it all plain?" he asked himself. "Does she understand? Does she know that I love her as no woman has ever been loved before?" Again and again he execrated himself. "Why did I not take the journey with her?" he queried of himself dejectedly. "Why let her travel alone?" Then saner thoughts ensued. "I will write to her," he told himself, "the first moment I get home," and he began to turn over and over in his mind the phrases he would use in this, his first love letter. "Yes, I will write to her."

"What did you say?"

It was Rubinstein, his head in at the open window, who had put the question. Boris turned, the rose leaves still in his hand, conscious of uttering his thoughts aloud, and met the sympathetic gaze of Anton Rubinstein.

"There are too many women here," said he quickly. "Take me home in your carriage."

Boris was inwardly angry at the interruption of his thoughts, but he said affably enough: "With the greatest pleasure, Anton Gregoriewitch."

Once inside the carriage Rubinstein lit his cigarette and stared before him, then he turned and put his hand affectionately on Boris' shoulder.

"Boris Alexanderowitch, you give me hope."

"I?" Boris turned his troubled eyes questioningly.

"Yes, you do not understand; but you and Louboff, this love affair of yours! Ah, only the other day I said; Art is dead because there are no Juliets and no Romeos. Well, I was wrong, I was wrong; you two, you love and you suffer as lovers should, as lovers did. Boris Alexanderowitch, as I watch you I feel young again, hopeful, I hear melodies, my fingers itch for a pencil."

Boris turned to him in amazement, the cold analysis of the musician's reasoning sickened him; the fact that any one could find satisfaction in the misery he was then enduring, and that he knew Louboff was enduring, caused him intense anger, pain and irritation.

"Ah, you artists!" he ejaculated bitterly.

“Yes, we artists,” assented Rubinstein meditatively. “This is a prosaic age, an age of bayonets and Mammon worship; the world nowadays is never well lost for love; women forget themselves only when the title deeds have passed into their keeping, and men think more of a dot than they do of bright eyes. It is no longer an age of romance: it is an age of reason, an age of calculation. I feel out of tune with it all, and I ask myself so often, have I been born too early or too late?”

“Anton Gregoriewitch, are you not happy?” Boris had asked the question unconsciously, then he halted; Rubinstein’s moods were uncertain. He was quite capable of taking umbrage.

“Happy! Boris Alexanderowitch, what is happiness or unhappiness? Do you know? You believe yourself unhappy now. Well, twenty, fifty years hence you will realize that your very happiness lay in this your present power for unhappiness.”

“You mean——” began Boris.

“This, you will realize too late, you cannot now. Ah, the whole gist is in this little phrase, *‘Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait.’* Boris Alexanderowitch, when you can apply this to yourself, when you are old, that

is, you will not really know happiness till then." Rubinstein's face was sphinx-like in its sarcasm. He paused; then he laughed, a laugh that sounded mirthless and mocking.

"Here is the Conservatory, Boris Alexanderowitch; many thanks for your kindness. *Au revoir*. Will you dine with me to-night?"

"Some other night, Anton Gregoriowitch, please."

"Ah, indulge yourself, indulge yourself, my Romeo. There is no luxury greater than that of grief."

As Boris saw Rubinstein enter the Conservatory, the figure of the great composer, old, shabby, pathetic, drooping, shambling along in fur boots and *shouba*, his shaggy locks just showing under his cap, it struck terror into Boris' soul.

"What does it all amount to?" he thought dejectedly. "There goes Rubinstein; he has had the homage of the world; men and women have spoiled him from his birth upward; fortune has favored him in all ways; yet his cynicism blasts one's soul. Unhappiness! yes, I know it. But my unhappiness is negative; it is only impatience; impatience of the happiness to be mine soon. Will the summer never come?"

When Boris reached home the household was just preparing for dinner. Two footmen were laying the table. It wanted but three-quarters of six. He commenced his letter; then the thought that he would have to eat, would have to talk, would have to listen to the conversation of others dismayed him. He left the letter unfinished and went out.

He went toward the Moika, and, standing on the bridge, stared at the uncurtained windows of what had once been Louboff's home.

"Oh, Michel, Michel," he thought, "only for you she would be here still! Or, even if she were now on her way to Berlin, she would be able to come back, and things would be so different."

Beneath and above the apartment of the Malkiels light shone in the windows. Boris could see shaded lamps, outlines of furniture, figures passing and repassing; only in Louboff's home was everything dark and desolate.

The sight further unnerved him. He returned home, and, when passing his mother's boudoir, she called to him, he affected not to hear her, but passed on. Then he sat down to his writing table, and, after covering the photograph of Louboff with kisses, settled down to finish his letter.

Everything was deadly still in the apartment. The ticking of the clock irritated him; he was about to rise and go for a walk when the rustle of silk sounded in the doorway, and his mother came forward and placed a cool, soft hand on his fevered brow.

The letter lay addressed before him. She glanced at it.

“Writing already to your sweetheart, my boy? I sympathize deeply with you; but brace up. You have not eaten anything to-day; you are haggard and disheveled. Let me send you something; or, perhaps, you will come to my boudoir and eat it there.”

“Not to-night, mother dear; I do not care to eat, and I am bad company.”

She understood the subtle appeal, and said quickly:

“Well, I will leave you then. Shall I have your letter posted? I am sending some of my own.”

“Please, mother.”

She stooped and kissed him, and, going out, went directly to her brother’s apartment.

He smiled as she entered.

“Well, fellow conspirator?” he said gleefully.

“The boy is demented. He has not eaten

anything, and he looks half crazy. See this letter, already." She threw the letter on the table before him.

The Count took it up, surveyed it with a grim smile, then tore it into a dozen fragments, and, going to the stove, placed it amid the live coals.

"God!" said the Countess, aghast, as she took one step toward him. "What are you doing? If she should write him; if he should find out!"

Count d'Annenkoff raised his eyebrows in reproach.

"Don't you give me credit for some diplomacy?" he asked shortly. "I have arranged for all that. Absolute instructions have been sent to the telegraph office and to the postoffice. No letters of hers will be delivered; no letters of his will be sent till they pass my personal supervision. She is a Nihilist. She can be grateful to Rubinstein that we ever allowed her to leave the country."

The Countess sighed. "It seems terrible," she said shudderingly, "but I suppose it is best. The thing has to be nipped in the bud."

"My dear," laughed the Count, sarcastically, "nipped in the bud? I intend to see it torn up by the root."

CHAPTER XXIII.

“Is there a letter for me? Is there a telegram for me?” In the days that followed these were the constant demands made by Boris Alexanderowitch.

The second day passing and no news reaching him from Louboff, he showed his anxiety plainly.

“She was so ill, mother, when she left; I do hope nothing serious is the matter. She has had so much trouble lately and has borne up so wonderfully; and working so hard, too. The excitement of giving a concert in a city like Berlin is enough to shake one’s nerves.”

“I feel,” he cried on the third day, “as if I ought to follow her! Why should I not? I really ought to be in Berlin. Why did I not think of that in time? I should be there to see her make her debut.”

His mother pacified him as best she could. Traveling just then, with so much snow all over the country, was necessarily slow and retarded, the telegraph wires were down, the mails delayed.

All that she could say or do she said and did; and the days went on till it was the fifth day; but still no answer came to his telegram and letters.

On the seventh day, the day of her concert, they brought him a letter. His mother herself left it on his desk one evening when he was out, and she waited for his return anxiously in one of the rooms close by. The letter was written on reaching Berlin, and had been delayed by the storm.

Well as his mother was conscious of what was coming—with Count d'Annenkoff she had read it—she was not prepared for the whirlwind of fury into which the letter seemed to throw him.

The bell from his study rang violently; it seemed as if he were breaking the furniture inside. His mother reached the door first, a servant behind her.

“What is it?” she cried, with real surprise in her voice on seeing his face distorted and flushed with anger and passion.

“I am going to Berlin! I am going to Berlin to-night!” he said hoarsely; then, turning to the servant, he added commandingly:

“Andre, pack up my things at once.”

“Why, my boy, what is this?” said the

Countess soothingly, as she motioned the servant away. "No train starts to-night for Berlin, and if it did, there is your passport to be attended to, and at quickest that will take a few days."

"A few days? It must be attended to at once," he said decisively. "What good is it to have an uncle who is Minister of the Interior otherwise?"

"But, my boy, what is it? Is Louboff Antonivna ill, or what?"

"I do not know—I do not know—unless it is some hellish plot!" he cried, misery in his voice and manner such as she never suspected her son capable of feeling. "Some hellish plot," he reiterated more loudly. "Here! read her letter. She never wrote that of her own accord, never; some one has forced her to it; or else, or else—she must be mad!"

The day following Count d'Annenkoff had a stormy scene with his nephew. The latter insisted on a passport that hour; the former was not to be pushed. He argued that there was no immediate hurry, that Boris could very well wait till the usual red tape had taken its course, and that in any case he could not interfere in so small a matter.

Boris suddenly remembered Louboff's fore-

bodings, her pessimism, her apathy, her constant reiteration about the future—always gloomy, unhopeful, sad.

“Well,” he said shortly, “if I cannot have my passport to-day, let it be forwarded to me at the frontier: for I start to-day. This afternoon I leave St. Petersburg,” he cried loudly, manly determination in his young voice, a challenge in his glance.

Count d’Annenkoff smiled. It suited his plans exactly to have Boris leave St. Petersburg.

“Well,” he said quietly, “just as you like. It will be all the same, and it is for you to decide.”

The afternoon train that left the northern city that day carried Boris, and it also carried two of the Secret Service men, the two cleverest and least scrupulous of those attached to Count d’Annenkoff’s entourage.

Boris knew his passport would be delayed a day or two, and, on reaching the frontier, he was resigned to his fate. He took rooms at a hotel and telegraphed constantly to his uncle; but got no reply. The officials told him the wires were down. On the fourth day, harassed and dismayed beyond endurance, he grew desperate.

A man came to him. "*Barin*," he said, "you look troubled. You are awaiting a passport that is delayed; is it not so? Now, I am a poor man and sometimes a poor man will take a risk. For a hundred roubles I will put you in a sack and drive you in my farmer's wagon across the frontier. I am a dealer in potatoes, and the sentries all know me. I can pass you."

"A hundred roubles?" Boris pulled out his purse at once and counted out the money. "How soon, how soon?" he asked anxiously.

"To-night," replied the man; "to-night you will come to my house; I will take you there now and we will cross the frontier before dawn. You are a big fellow, *barin*," he went on, smiling, "but I don't think we will have any difficulty in bundling you in. Once over the frontier, you know——"

"Yes, once over the frontier," repeated Boris, the gloom in his face disappearing as his spirits rose buoyantly.

He left his hotel near midnight, having changed his student's uniform and put on plain clothes. The peasant hurried him to his back yard, where the sleigh, with its sacks of potatoes, stood ready. The night was bitterly cold, but to facilitate his entrance into the

sack Boris insisted on removing his fur coat; then the peasant whipped up his horses, and they started on their journey. Cramped and numb with the cold, Boris listened to the swish of the steel runners over the frozen snow, and the rattle of the harness. With the true lightheartedness of the peasant, his driver was singing snatches of song and speaking endearingly to his three horses. Then they reached the frontier and a rough voice challenged the driver. A hurried conversation, held in whispers, passed between some men; then the man showed his papers.

“Potatoes, potatoes!” cried a voice and a soldier began swinging a lantern over the sleigh. Suddenly Boris felt a hand passed over his arm.

“Potatoes, potatoes! Oh, hey! Let us have a look at these potatoes. A new growth, my friend; a strange growth, on my soul!”

A moment later two soldiers liberated Boris, and a fearful scene ensued. Boris stormed and swore. “Telegraph to Count d’Annenkoff! Find out if I am not Count Gourowsky, his nephew!” he cried, shaking his fist in the faces of those nearest him; but his jailers had their orders. They laughed at him, jeered him, and treated him as a mad-

man, till finally his actions and his statements became so peculiar they almost came to believe he was one.

Handcuffed and raging, he was thrown into a cell.

An attack of acute pneumonia and brain fever sent Boris to the prison hospital the following day, and the Countess for many a day and night following wept and prayed, as only a mother can, that her son be spared to her.

At the end of a month, weak, emaciated, a shadow of his former self, he was on the road to convalescence.

Still protesting that he wished to go at once to Berlin, he was taken instead to St. Petersburg, where the heavy winter was just breaking up, and all was desolation and dreariness, the streets filled with slush, the atmosphere moist and gloomy.

He asked for the papers, especially the papers from Berlin. It was the Countess herself who gave them to him and offered to read them to him, but he shook his head. He wanted to read them himself.

He read of Louboff's success, and his face flushed as he saw the many flattering encomiums of the German critics and the prevalence of the term "colossal," Rubinstein's

very expression. She had given not one, but four concerts, and a certain Baron Rudolph Oppenheim, one of the richest bankers in Germany, had carpeted the *estrade* on every occasion with roses in her honor. Her triumph was complete.

Boris still read on, hungry for news. He came on a paragraph which announced Fraulein Malkiel's regretted quitting of the concert stage, and then followed the announcement of her marriage to Baron Oppenheim.

Boris had a relapse. Specialists were called in, and for days he hung between life and death, then slowly the splendid vitality of his youth triumphed.

One day, lying on his couch, morose, weak, miserable, only half conscious, a shadow came between him and the light, and looking up, he saw the leonine head of Anton Rubinstein bending over him.

Rubinstein took the chair by the side of the couch, and his big, cool hand clasped that of Boris in a mute sympathy.

"You have news?" asked Boris weakly.

An eager light had crept into his eyes, weird and staring from his long illness.

"News! Ah, my boy, women, women! No, I have no news; I never wish to hear her name

again. She treated me as she treated you; as women always treat us, when we are fools enough to trust them, or expect anything from them. I came just to see you."

"Ah, to gloat over me again?"

A pained expression crossed Rubinstein's mobile face.

"Gloat?" he said questioningly.

"Yes; what was it you said that day in the carriage, the—the last time I saw you—and her? Oh, Anton Gregoriewitch, gloat, gloat; I have suffered—suffered the agonies of the damned—I am suffering!"

"And to no purpose."

"Anton Gregoriewitch, can you explain things?"

Rubinstein shrugged his shoulders and the expression of his face was ironical in the extreme.

"No," he replied, "I never try where women are concerned. I have lived through it all. I know women. Why," he paused, looked quickly at Boris, and then continued steadily, yet with apparent effort:

"I left Russia in 1854; my first great tour. I left a girl then, right here in St. Petersburg; a girl I loved passionately; a singer; her name—well, no matter—I could have sworn

then an oath before Heaven that if ever woman loved a man, she loved me. She was my inspiration. I went from town to town, doing my best, gathering laurels, gathering them only to lay at her feet. I returned"—Rubinstein stopped short; over his expressive features there passed a look of agony and scorn; then he laughed with a bitterness that made Boris shiver—"and—I found her married."

Rubinstein put his hand to his forehead a moment, then he went on passionately: "Did I find a reason? No! No! Women and reason are not partners. Woman is, has been, and always will be, an enigma; the cruelest of all enigmas."

"You got over it."

"Did I?"

"Anton Gregoriewitch, the world says so."

"The world? Perhaps—I loved other women. Yes, hundreds of them; but, well, there is something about the—the first—it is never quite the same; the romance that is like no other dies forever when trust goes."

The light had faded and Rubinstein rose and paced the floor restlessly. He stood in the center of the room, his head bent; then, going over to the grand pianoforte, he opened

it. A moment later he commenced his own Leonore Ballade.

As the opening chords of the grandest and weirdest of all tone pictures for the piano-forte smote the stillness, Boris sat up for the first time since his illness, his intellect alert, his brain keen to all the emotions born of the inspired playing of Russia's greatest pianist. All the agony and despair, the poignant grief of disappointed love, the desolation of hopelessness, the soul weariness and revolt of harassed passion, rang out in the music. Boris, listening, could feel the blood recede from his heart, his hands grow numb.

The amazing technique of the piece that the greatest of latter-day pianists find insurmountable seemed but a plaything to the composer. The difficulties he himself had created had no place in his memory. He was wrestling only with passions and emotions, exhausting the gamut of human pain and suffering, of terror and despair, playing as few ever had heard him.

When he had finished Boris looked up in exhausted silence. The room was in semi-darkness, and, rising, Rubinstein himself turned on the lights; then he came slowly over to where Boris was.

Boris had fallen back on his pillows; he lay staring up at the mobile face, with its strong lines and shadows of suffering and passion, its magnetic charm that had conquered thousands, its conscious power and majesty of genius. Looking, Boris no longer marveled at the absolute devotion—which had once so angered him—that Louboff gave to Anton Rubinstein.

He saw him as she saw him, a Titan among men.

Rubinstein came nearer and passed his hand lightly over the hair and forehead of Boris, gently and tenderly, as a woman might.

“Eh bien, mon camarade, camarade in disillusion, camarade in misery, camarade in our knowledge of women.”

“You have not forgotten yet?”

“Forgotten?” Rubinstein’s voice was soft and almost caressing in its misery. “There are some things one never forgets—till the grave; and then, who knows? Some say hell, or heaven—others Nirvana.”

He laughed shortly and extended his hand. “I must go now. You will brace up and come and see me. One must not lose one’s manhood because a woman has broken faith. The world is big and its interests are many.” He

paused, looked searchingly at Boris, threw back his head and gave Boris one of his powerful handshakes. "You will take my advice, and you will come and see me," he repeated.

"Some day, *cher Maitre*."

"Good; I shall look forward to seeing you. You are very sympathetic to me, Boris Alexanderowitch. *Au revoir*."

"*Au revoir*, Anton Gregoriewitch. Thank you so much for coming," said Boris gratefully, as he watched him to the door; then the heavy curtains hid him from view—the great composer had passed out of his life forever.

It was springtime at last. Over in the Islands the birds were singing, thrushes and blackbirds piped in the lilacs, the air was balmy with the odor of flowers, the waters were alive with pleasure craft, the woods with laughter and the revelry of merrymakers.

Boris, heeding Rubinstein's advice, got out of his sick bed and drove one day to the Gourowsky Palace. From the grasses he picked a bunch of the big double violets, "just to show her," he muttered, "that I at least keep my promise."

He sent no note; there was nothing he could say; he knew she would understand, and Count d'Annenkoff, feeling the glory of spring and softened by it, let the pretty flowers be forwarded.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

Ten years later Russia was in one of her periodical throes of financial distress; there were rumors of wars and internal troubles. Paid agents circulated in the various European cities statements that the time was ripe for a new loan and the great banking houses made their calculations and came forward with plans.

Boris Alexanderowitch, who occupied a responsible position in the Ministry of Finance, one day opened a letter from Baron Rudolph Oppenheim. A strange thrill of curiosity and disgust shot through him as he took up the letter. This was the writing of the man who was her husband—the man who had usurped his place. How neat, how well-formed was his caligraphy, how polished and elegant the style of the crisp, well-chosen sentences. Boris laid the letter before his chief, was directed to reply to it, and a week later the great wizard of finance, the man whose power was greater than that of kings, arrived in St. Petersburg.

It was to be a great loan, a loan of mil-

liards; but, in spite of all the secrecy with which such matters are surrounded and guarded, the loan was soon openly discussed and commented on, and the presence of the great European banker, said the gossips, made its signing a certainty. To such an extent and so daring was the gossip and rumors grew so wild and false that finally the money market became unsettled, and in consequence the wily old banker went back to Berlin with nothing accomplished.

The Tsar's advisers saw a crisis ahead. Money was needed and needed badly, but the chances for getting it most unpropitious. The Russian Minister of Finance had a difficult task before him. Even the most courageous of the banking houses held off just then from taking risks. If, however, the mountain would not go to Mahomed, then Mahomed must go to the mountain. The matter formed a discussion in the Imperial Council, and suddenly the president, Count d'Annenkoff—he had given up the portfolio as Minister of the Interior some years previously—said suddenly to the Minister of Finance: “My nephew, Boris Alexanderowitch, is intimate, or was, rather, with Madame Oppenheim—she is a Russian, you know—send him to Ber-

lin. If any one can manage this matter, he can. The baron is the only one who has made us any practical offer.'"

The Minister of Finance knew Count d'Annenkoff's advice was always valuable, and as a last resort he accepted it.

Boris received his orders in silence. It was a great honor for so young a man; but he showed no sign of emotion or elation. He made his preparation speedily and went on what was practically his first vacation in ten years.

These years had made great changes in Boris Alexanderowitch. The laughing, open-hearted youth, had given place to a man, gloomy, morose, silent, almost sullen in demeanor.' He was a diplomat, nothing more; the youngest of all diplomats, and the most dangerous of rivals; a diplomat without vices and without distractions. A worker, pure and simple, he had gone from step to step rapidly; almost too rapidly, for it had made him many enemies; but even these recognized in him the coming man. His family had worked for him ceaselessly, the prestige of his uncle had helped him enormously, and his own industry and faithfulness had done the rest.

As his uncle had predicted, in spite of many

setbacks, Boris concluded his difficult task satisfactorily. When the matter was all settled, all that remained being clerical work and the signatures of those concerned, which were to be attached later in St. Petersburg, the Baron invited Count Gourowsky to his castle on the Rhine.

"I want you to know my wife. I ought not to say it, perhaps," he added gallantly, "but I must: she is the most charming and beautiful woman in Germany. She was a pupil of Rubinstein, and she will be delighted to welcome you, I know. As a matter of fact, let me tell you, it was the Baroness who really talked me into this loan."

Boris bowed. He tried to say something, but no words would come. In that moment his mind was one wild, bewildering jumble of emotions.

"Let me show you her photograph."

"No." Boris stood up. "I— Why—" he went on as calmly as he could. "I do not know if the Baroness remembers me, but I knew her when she was a pupil of Rubinstein's."

"Oh, indeed? Good; then all the more reason you should come at once and renew the acquaintance. This time I insist. My wife"—

he went on somewhat thoughtfully—"is such a strange woman; she keeps to herself too much. She shuns society, yet people run after her constantly. If you already know her there is no need for me to tell you how charming she is. When I married her first, jealous people—the world is full of them—said: 'She marries you for your money; wait, see how she will neglect you,' but year by year she shows me instead new proofs of her devotion. We are so happy together, ah," went on the old man, his eyes suspiciously moist, "it is hard to believe it, but, when I urge on her to have people to our house, to go out, to amuse herself, she always says, smiling: 'No. Why should we have people here? Let us instead have a quiet evening, just you and I, Rudolph.' "

Every fresh word the Baron uttered seemed to stab Boris more deeply, and his voice was still and constrained as he said coldly:

"You are most fortunate."

"Fortunate? Surely, so fortunate that sometimes I doubt the evidences of my own senses, that I—I should have the love of so incomparable a woman. Why, the last ten years of my life have been one long dream. Paradise itself."

Boris made a gesture of impatience. He could stand no more; his very heartstrings seemed cracking. The Baron turned his surprised eyes on him. "Pardon me," he said, smiling. "I rhapsodize, and, as the saying goes, there is no fool like an old fool; but, believe me, this time I am not altogether one. You will come and judge for yourself. I have still to persuade you, have I? Do come, my wife will be so delighted. She has everything Russian or belonging to Russia on the brain. She speaks nothing else when she can, and two-thirds of our servants are Russian."

Boris hesitated. "What good to reopen the old wound?" was his first decision; then an uncontrollable desire to see her once more overcame him, a desire he found himself unable to combat got the better of his judgment, and he accepted.

It was Friday afternoon, and then and there the Baron wanted to take him to his country place, but Boris pleaded business, and promised to be with him the day following.

"It would not do to take her by surprise," he thought.

Once again he passed a night of inquietude and sleeplessness, such as those she had caused him in his early manhood. The old

fever came over him and he was back in the past, to the scenes of his student life, living over again all the vivid events of his meeting with Louboff, the night with Rubinstein, the delirium of his last days of happiness.

“Why do I worry? Why do I still think of her? She deserted me,” he thought bitterly. “Deserted me to marry Oppenheim, a man of millions, old, greedy, horrible,” and the wrinkled face of the famous banker, handsome and benevolent though it was, rose up before him as he saw it distorted through his jealousy—yellow, hawknosed, and repulsive.

The Baron met him at the station, and in the gorgeous sunlight of a May afternoon they drove through the enchanting loveliness of the Rhine scenery.

Again Boris could feel his heart beating as when a youth, the blood surging madly through his veins, in that thrilling, rapturous excitement like unto no other. They stopped before a great feudal pile, once the home of a prince of the blood, and bought by the millions of the shrewd and lucky financier.

“This is her home, the home for which she sold our happiness,” Boris told himself, and he tried to hate the beauty about him, to find ugliness, to infuse into himself the bitter-

ness he knew was right to feel against her.

"Baroness Oppenheim," said the manservant, in response to the rapid inquiries of the Baron, "is in the music-room."

Away at the end of a great Gothic chamber Boris saw a white figure. She came rapidly toward them, her hand outstretched, her white chiffon draperies sweeping the polished oak floor noiselessly, her cheeks pink as the early roses she wore. Then once more her hand was clasped in his, he looked down into the star-like eyes, as, with a flush spreading to the roots of his golden hair, he bent and kissed the hand she gave him.

"Will she dare salute me Russian fashion on the forehead," Boris wondered in agonizing nervousness, as he feared for a moment as if his reason was leaving him.

Ten years had not changed her; they had given a greater dignity to her manner, a rounder contour to her always sylph-like form; that strange, elusive something, mysterious and haunting, which marriage gives to some women, had but added to her charm.

The Baron excused himself; Louboff and Boris sat down.

For a moment they could find nothing to say, then his confused gaze stole to her hand;

she still wore his betrothal ring of turquoises.

"I have to thank you," she began at last, "for the bunch of violets you sent from the Islands; they came sweet and lovely."

She had remembered that. She dared to remind him.

"And I, Madame," he answered, his voice glacial in its hauteur, as he bowed ironically, "I have to thank you for months and years of misery."

He had thrown down the gauntlet the very moment of his arrival.

She raised her lovely eyes to his, sad and eloquent in their reproachfulness. "You are very great," she replied gently, "I have watched your career, and that, that at least, you owe to me."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Our betrothal was a mistake from the first," she continued agitatedly. "I knew it all along; I told you at the time and the night your mother pointed it all out to me."

"Ah, the night I was sent for, to play cards," he broke in.

"Yes. Well, I made up my mind there must be a sacrifice and I was the one who had to make that sacrifice."

“But, was it a sacrifice?” he inquired with pointed sarcasm.

Her voice broke and trembled as she replied softly: “Boris, I gave up my art lest you should think that had come between us; I have married the best man on earth, a man noble, philanthropic, clever—but—I only married to save you; I married because till I was bound hand and foot I could not feel sure of myself. It was not a marriage of inclination or of greed, and do not forget that there is forty years’ difference in age between my husband and myself.” Then she held up her hand with a half sob. “See,” she added piteously, “I wear your ring.”

He grasped her hand roughly. “Then you love me still?” he cried passionately. “You love me as I still love you? Yet you allowed worldly considerations to come between us. Oh, Louboff, where was your trust?”

“I acted for the best; I acted for your good; I made a mistake, perhaps, and yet”—she added in a lighter tone, as she looked up at him—“you are great—you——”

“Louboff!” he cried, his voice ringing clear and far through the room, the acoustics of which were perfect, “you worked me the greatest wrong woman ever worked on man;

you blasted my life, and yet I love you still, and, good God, you love me still! Oh, sweetheart, sweetheart!"

She jumped to her feet. "Boris, Boris," she said quickly, "hush! I am another man's wife now, and he is good, so good; he has done all in his power to make me happy. I cannot listen to you. Put the old Louboff from your thoughts; she is dead, or worse than dead; be yourself, control yourself. Come," she added, after a pause of poignant emotion to both, "let me show you my rose garden; the air will do you good."

She went forward as she finished and for a moment, as she passed beyond the silk curtains to the window leading to the terrace, he hesitated, seeing nothing but one blur of the things before his vision, then he went after her.

Two minutes later there tottered from an inner room the bent, decrepit figure of the old Baron, his face ghastly pale, his gray head bent in utter dejection.

CHAPTER XXV.

Boris arrived in St. Petersburg with the good news that the Baron was to follow in a few days to sign the loan, just as soon as all the innumerable details could be arranged. He was welcomed enthusiastically by his colleagues at the Ministerium. His chief complimented him highly on his success, promising to lay the matter specially before the Tsar. Boris listened with apathy, and for the first time in his career turned a deaf ear to the call of duty. Matters of importance needed consideration, a mass of correspondence awaited him, but, try as he would, he could not saddle his attention to work.

The second day after his arrival in St. Petersburg, after placing the wreath Louboff had given him on Rubinstein's grave in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, Boris asked for a few days' leave of absence and started immediately for Gourowsky.

The memory of the one evening he had spent with the Baroness Rudolph haunted and unnerved him. In her rose garden Louboff had exercised a dignity toward him that hurt him.

She would not let him speak of himself nor of his feelings, studiously avoiding all mention of her own, and she addressed him throughout as Boris Alexanderowitch. It was of Russia she spoke; Russia, and always Russia.

“I have wanted so much to go back,” she said sadly, “and perhaps now I will some day. Oh, Boris Alexanderowitch, it is impossible to realize how dear the land of one’s birth and early associations can be till one is denied access to it. The snow and the desolation, our beautiful sudden spring, the steppes, the peasants, the church bells booming in the frosty air—all the Byzantine loveliness, so peculiarly a part of our country. Ah, what would I not give for a sight of it? For a drive down the Nevsky or to scent one of those wild northern breezes that blow over the Neva.”

“You can love it like that, a land that has treated you so harshly?” Boris thought, and as he noted the melancholy droop of her lovely mouth, he felt like saying things that were wild and unreasonable.

Their leavetaking was simple. He shook hands with her, kissed her hand, and, turning away, asked himself, was this really a part-

ing? Could it be that, after so many years of misery and misunderstanding, she was allowing him to go away without one promise or token of her affection? "Ah!" he told himself bitterly, "she is a *comedienne*; she has never loved me, never!" Then he looked down into her eyes and the agony he read there made his heart beat and the blood rush to his temples. He paused, looked back, tried to say something, but the old Baron was beside him, and the next moment he had entered the carriage and Louboff stood on the steps waving *adieu*, her face white as death.

How the journey back was accomplished Boris never knew, for to him it passed as a dream. On reaching St. Petersburg he had pulled himself sufficiently together to give lucid answers to the many questions put to him and make his report, then he collapsed.

When he arrived at Gourowsky, unheralded and unexpected, his mother met him, enthusiastic delight in her welcome.

"Boris, Boris, what lucky wind blows you here? This is indeed a joy I had not looked for."

Something in the expression of his face alarmed her. He made no effort to return her embrace; he stood stiff and unbending on the threshold.

“What—what is it, Boris? Has anything happened?” she asked, alarmed.

“Mother,” he said at last, “I want to be alone. I am upset. I have just arrived from Berlin, as you know; from Berlin—a journey I should have made ten years ago,” he added, concentrated bitterness in his voice, his blue eyes bent on her disdainfully.

“Boris, Boris, you have seen her?”

“Yes.”

“And——”

“Mother, why go over it? You have been a good mother to me—perhaps—but when you came between us——”

Emotion overmastered him, he turned quickly and left her presence.

For several days she saw nothing of him. Making a pretext of looking over the estate he slept at the house of his overseer, spending his days riding and roaming through the woods.

“It was better as I thought it, during the last ten years,” he told himself bitterly. “A man can live down the inevitable, but this—this—that Louboff should love me yet, work me so grievous an injury and that my mother——”

The burden of his thoughts seemed greater

than he could bear; the quiet and loneliness of Gourowsky threw him entirely on his own resources. Night or day it seemed he could not get away from himself and his trouble even for a minute.

"Boris Alexanderowitch is mad," said his people among themselves, and they went with weird tales to the Countess, who listened appalled.

Before a week was over a telegram came for him from the Ministerium. He had then not been seen for several days and the Countess herself, half maddened by agonizing doubts and fears, was one of the seekers. They traced him at last, several miles away to the house of a peasant, and the Countess Gourowsky threw herself on her knees before him.

"Oh, Boris," she cried, bursting into tears, "thank God you are living, I—I feared——"

The expression of his face was ironical.

"No, mother, no; not that," he said quietly, "only cowards do that." Then he tore open the telegram.

"Come at once," it ran, signed by the Minister of Finance.

"There must be work ahead," he thought, "much work or they would not send for me."

An hour later he was speeding as fast as steam could take him.

On reaching St. Petersburg he went straight to the Ministerium and was ushered at once into the office of his chief.

"Gourowsky," said the latter looking up hastily, "where have you been? I had expected that when you knew the loan was in danger you would have come back without summoning."

"The loan in danger?" queried Boris.

"Yes, Baron Oppenheim is dead."

Without a word or sign of warning, Boris Alexanderowitch fell face forward unconscious at the feet of the Minister.

He could never account for it himself, nor could the doctors hastily summoned. Ten minutes after they had revived him he was in full possession of all his senses and an hour later he was at his desk.

CHAPTER XXVI.

During the week that Boris had idled at Gourowsky disquieting telegrams reached the Russian Ministry of Finance. Baron Oppenheim had been stricken with paralysis. His journey was delayed. Then had come the telegram announcing his death.

This latter created consternation. Would the loan fall through? Would the Baron's decease make any difference? were the questions that agitated the Ministers.

Boris brought all his energies to bear on the situation. He was once more cool headed, keen, alert of intellect. Couriers were at once despatched and telegrams began to pour in on the banking house in Berlin.

"Yes," ciphered the dead banker's representatives, "it may make a difference. The enormous fortune of the Baron has passed absolutely to his wife, it remains with her."

Boris laid the telegram before the Council of the Emperor and Count d'Annenkoff, reading it, made a gesture of hopelessness.

"That settles it," he said calmly. "The Baroness Oppenheim is a Russian Jewess

and the game is hers. She holds trumps. We may as well acknowledge ourselves beaten."

Boris smiled. The other Ministers were equally as pessimistic as the Count. Boris made no move to allay their fears. He had no voice in the Council, he was merely acting as secretary to the chief; but on returning home with the latter, he said quietly:

"Prince, sleep quietly and comfortably, do not let this thing worry you, just give them time to bury the Baron. Rest assured the loan is made."

Two days later another Council was called hastily and Count d'Annenkoff, strangely elated and jubilant, was reading the contents of the latest cipher telegram to his colleagues. Boris was looking straight at him and for a moment as the old statesman felt the glance he was cowed by the triumph and resentful scorn that seemed to blaze at him from his nephew's eyes. He paused, confused, stammered, and for the first time lost his self-control. Then he delivered his message.

The Russian Jewess in the end had forgotten old wrongs and proved herself a patriot. The great loan was made.

* * * * *

A year later, Boris, agitated but smiling,

was walking up and down the platform of the railway station waiting for the train from Berlin. It was early summer and the scorching sun beat fiercely down on the streets of the city.

The train steamed in slowly and Louboff, her lovely face radiant with joy and happiness, waved from her far-off position on the platform a gay recognition. One moment more and they were together.

People descending from the train, and those awaiting relatives, stared at the ferocity of his embrace; then they smiled. A group of moujiks chewing sunflower seeds in happy contentment looked, too, and nudged each other, but of all this Louboff and Boris were blissfully unconscious.

"Is it not as I said? Is it not as I said?" Boris cried joyfully. "Beloved, I saw it all, as it was, not you. You are back in Russia, as I always told you you would, and to-morrow will see you my wife."

"Boris, Boris," said Louboff, as she disengaged herself from his clasp and turned to greet his mother, who had just arrived.

"Welcome home, welcome to Russia," the older woman said with a catch in her voice. "Welcome, my daughter."

“Baroness, may I, too, offer my congratulations and my wishes for your happiness?” It was the suave, high-bred tones of Count d’Annenkoff that fell on her ear, and Louboff turned, and offered him her hand with a smile that made even him marvel at her beauty.

The Gourowsky palace in the Islands was all lit up. Boris and Louboff themselves would have preferred a simple wedding, but the Tsar had intimated a wish to see his youngest Minister’s marriage, and a great ball terminated the ceremony which had been solemnized in St. Isaac’s with all the pomp and stateliness known to the Orthodox Church.

At last the Tsar and Tsaritzza left, the other guests quickly followed, and Louboff and Boris were, for the first time that evening, alone.

Dawn was creeping over the waters and the forest, the heavens in the East shone resplendent with intermingling hues of gold and rose. All at once it seemed to Louboff and her husband that nature awoke.

A sweet piping from a thrush in the lilac bushes was answered by its mate; the call of a blackbird sounded in the distance; then every twig and blade of grass, every tree-top

gave sign of movement in the first cool loveliness of the dawn. The darkness of night was over, the light grew stronger and stronger and far up in the blue of the heavens a lark commenced its wild, sweet pæon of gladness.

His arm stole about her, his lips sought hers in one long kiss of passionate delight; then the soft tones of his voice smote her ear and mingled with the lark's song, blither and more triumphant in their intensity:

“Oh, my love, my love,” he cried. “We belong to each other, forever!”

THE END.





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